XS
F819s

26358

Library of the
Church Divinity School
of the Pacific

St. Francis of Sales

D & J. Sadlier, New York

THE

TRUE SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES

OF

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES,

BISHOP AND PRINCE OF GENEVA,

INSTITUTOR AND FOUNDER

OF THE

ORDER OF THE VISITATION OF HOLY MARY.

FAITHFULLY TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

WITH A PREFACE BY

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL WISEMAN.

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION LIBRARY 1962

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL of the PACIFIC LIBRARY

NEW YORK:
D. & J. SADLIER & CO., 164 WILLIAM STREET.
BOSTON—128 FEDERAL STREET.
MONTREAL—CORNER NOTRE DAME AND ST. FRANCOIS XAVIER STS.
1863.

BX
2179
F8
V72
1863

~~XS~~
~~F819S~~

THE TRUE

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES

OF

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES.

[The Copyright is reserved.]

26358

PREFACE.

The usual object of a preface is to claim the reader's interest for a work, or his indulgence for its defects, or his better understanding of it, through explanations of its plan and objects. But a preface to a book by St. Francis de Sales must appear superfluous to every catholic reader, on any of these grounds. The author's name, a name so revered, so beloved by every devout soul, at once excites interest, excludes all apologies, and dispenses with explanations. Having been requested, by the pious community of his daughters in England, to prefix to the new translation of his "Conferences," a few preliminary pages, we find it no easy task to comply with their flattering request. Only the hope of bringing these excellent discourses to the knowledge of more lovers of true devotion, than their modest title would guide to their perusal, can form an excuse to ourselves, or to our readers.

At first sight it may appear unreasonable to say that conferences, or spiritual lectures, delivered within the walls of a single convent, having its own special character, not written by their author, but from memory, by his devout hearers, can promise much usefulness beyond the order to which that house belonged, or at most, beyond the sphere of religious life. Now so far from this being, in our judgment, the case, we consider them practically calculated to do much good beyond the cloister and the chapter-house of monastery or convent. They will be read, we trust with pleasure, and we are sure with profit, by devout persons living in the world, by clergy and laity; the former of whom will find in them invaluable principles and advice for the guidance of consciences, while the latter cannot fail to derive from their study, consolation, encouragement, and direction.

And how is this? Because, while undoubtedly the applications and illustrations of St. Francis, in this work, are mainly referred to, and drawn from, the duties and virtues of the conventual life, the whole book is pervaded by the *spirit* of the Saint, a spirit which ever bears with it these qualities, or results. The human

heart, and the christian's way to heaven, in whatever condition of life, are essentially the same: the one made by the One Divine Hand; the other pointed out by the Heavenly Finger of Him who alone is "the way, the truth, and the life." With both St. Francis deals in his Conferences, and with both no one was ever more familiar than he. He cannot speak of the heart, its emotions, its passions, its direction, to a religious, but he must needs touch secret springs that fly open, and discover hidden treasures, or lurking miseries, in each of our hearts. For its powers unemployed, or misapplied, will be fully revealed to us.

And so the path of life eternal, as shown particularly to the Sisters of the Visitation, is not the painful and thorny one of penance, and austerity, but that of charity, humility, sweetness, union of the affections with God, devotion, kindness to every one, respectfulness, considerateness, and obedience, all bound up in strict order and observance of rule. And by what other way than this, does any one entertain any rational expectation of reaching heaven?

But perhaps we are prematurely entering into details. Let us rather, as our design is, endea-

vour to seize, and describe, what we have called the *spirit* of St. Francis, so admirably exhibited to us in this little volume.

What does this expression mean? No one has given us a better explanation of it than the Saint himself in his thirteenth conference, "on the *spirit* of the Rules." He there shows us, how all religious orders have one general and common spirit, "that of aspiring to the perfection of charity;" but each has its individual spirit, in the means by which its rules direct the attainment of that end. (P. 199.)

And so it is with spiritual writers. They all propose to themselves one aim; that of guiding souls, through the practice of virtue, to eternal salvation. This many of them do excellently, and it would be difficult to give a decided preference among many. Some may write better than others; illustrate their subjects more agreeably; throw into their manner more cheerfulness or more gravity; lay more stress on particular works or virtues; inculcate more some favourite devotion. But all treat of sin and repentance, the sacraments and grace, the manner of overcoming vices and subduing the

passions, and the gradual acquisition of virtue and perfection.

But we shall hardly find one, of whom we can say that he possesses a *spirit* of his own: one who distinguishes himself from others, not by a higher degree, but by a distinct order, of excellence; one who has transfused his own individual soul into what he has written; who we feel, as we read him, has long practised every thing that he enjoins and advises; and who consequently lives in every line of his pages, breathes, throbs, pants in every word, as if it were laid on his own bosom, over his own heart while we peruse it. We shall meet with few who, from their own meditations and transports of devotion, have added to the treasures of piety stored up in the Church before them, and transmitted a fresh supply, accepted by her, and laid up by her own hands, in her treasury, like relics and sacred jewels, precious to herself and her children.

Of these few St. Francis is one. We might read excellent volumes by holy writers, and form no distinct idea from them of individual character. Holy, wise, and learned we should know, and see, them to have been; but we

should feel little intimacy with them. St. Francis so lives in every page that he has written, that we see his own peculiar disposition stamped on it. No one else could have written it. And why? Because what we have called his *spirit* pervades all that it dictates, and that spirit is life and breath, and soul, and personality. For, as St. Paul asks, "what man knoweth the things of a man, except the spirit of (that) man, which is in him?" (1 Cor. ii. 11.) the individuality of each man, and his consciousness of self, which distinguishes him from every other, has its seat in his *spirit*. And one who can in his actions or words thoroughly manifest that spirit, can resemble none else, and can be resembled by none else.

Now to illustrate what we wish to say of St. Francis, as thus unfolding his spirit through, and in, his writings, let us go into a higher order of holiness, and see this idea practically exhibited.

The most perfect class of saints in the Church is undoubtedly that of the Apostles, not only from its privileges, but also from its virtues. They rise above all others by the sublimity of their Apostolic *spirit*. This, which we all can

easily perceive, distinguishes them from every other band in the army of Saints. And we understand it as the general characteristic of that "glorious choir." The same unselfish life of labour, in obedience to their divine call and commission, the same readiness to suffer and die for its accomplishment, the same zeal and laboriousness, and the same spotless life and superhuman virtue, compose that character, which is simply called their *spirit*. We know but little of the lives and acts of many: but we never doubt that Bartholomew, and Thaddeus, and Thomas, and Philip possessed it, and displayed it, in their dark and thankless missions, equally with their more celebrated brethren.

Yet even among these, there were inequalities, though not differences. In St. Peter eminently stand forth the characteristics of his prerogatives; authority, ardour, sagacity and power to lead, with a strong repentant love of his crucified Lord. In St. Paul we see all that was required by his grand apostleship of the nations, untiring activity, burning zeal, and wonderful tact, eloquence, and defiance of opposition and persecution. Still no one ever speaks of the *spirit* of St. Peter, or the *spirit*

of St. Paul, otherwise than as the apostolic *spirit* common to both, and to their fellow apostles, only more wonderfully developed, and pre-eminent in their order.

But we may speak, and do, of the *spirit* of St. John, as distinct from the common gifts of the apostleship, as having impregnated the universal Church for ever, with a distinct wisdom or grace, the absence of which would have been a loss, and the existence of which, we feel that God communicated through him alone. John breathed upon the infant Church, a breath which at once pervaded her, which did not indeed communicate to her what was instinctive and congenital to her, love of her Creator and her Spouse, but which gave it life, activity, system, and perfect form. The whole theory and practice was at once communicated to her of the "triple cord" of love, of the love of God for man, of the love of man for God, and of the love of each man for all the rest of men. We all know whence he drew this breath, or rather where it was quickened, and purified. As in the living circulation, the air which we inhale flows through its own channels, while the sluggish blood presses through its own veins; and,

though both are kept separate, yet by the contact between their respective conduits, through a subtle process of infiltration, they act on one another; and the blood runs brightened and freshened by momentary approximation, rather than access, to the renovating æther: so John, though he but laid his head on the outward covering of the adorable Heart of Jesus, received at every throb a mysterious communication with the life that beat there, a participation of the love, marvellous and divine, which abode in it, which transformed his entire being into a union of life and love with those of Christ, not granted to any other apostle.

Hence he could speak nothing else but love. If he writes a Gospel, love diffuses a golden glow over it, totally different from any other's—it is the Gospel of love. If he writes a long epistle to the universal Church, or a short letter to a lady and her children, it must be on love; and we know that he spoke ever on this one topic, till the thoughts and words of his long life gradually distilled and condensed, at last, in the feebleness of his frame and organs, concentrated themselves into the one sentence, which, Sunday after Sunday, formed his only

sermon; till, by its monotony, it wearied his hearers, but cannot weary the Church of ages; "My little children, love one another."

Such is the *spirit* of St. John; and it is not too much to say that in the modern Church, a spirit not dissimilar has been given singularly to St. Francis de Sales. And from our illustration, drawn so high, we may more easily understand what constitutes this divine gift of a particular spirit. O that we had space to open all our mind on this subject, in connection with, and to the honour of, either Saint. It is full of beautiful suggestions, and branches out into sweet and enchanting by-paths. But we are only engaged in the humble work of a preface, and not composing a treatise. Let us then confine ourselves to St. Francis.

The spirit of a Saint is like a delicate and exquisite perfume, that can scarcely be defined, though enjoyed by all. It is a cordial that refreshes, an elixir that quickens, different from all others, though one cannot always say how. Each of these is, or may be compounded of many ingredients, yet so blended in a secret laboratory where "the apothecary shall make sweet confections, and make up ointments of

health," (Ecclus. xxxviii. 7.) that the most sensitive organ cannot discover what they are; for they give one single and inimitable result. And so the peculiar spirit of a holy man has a common base of virtue, with every other perfect servant of God's. He will be humble, patient, devout, mortified, pure, watchful, a man of prayer and meditation, and above all, on fire with divine charity. But blended with all these virtues, there will be an ætherial savour, that seems to exhale from them, and distinguishes them, a sweet aroma unattainable by any other.

And it will be that multitudes who cannot describe it, may nevertheless be conscious of it. The entire Church will recognise the gift: every one of her children feel it. It is like the Magdalen's spikenard: "the house was filled with its odour:" (Jo. xii. 3.) and many enjoyed it, who saw not whence it came.

The Church has indeed openly recognised in St. Francis the existence of such a peculiar spiritual gift, a spirit of his own. In his Collect, she praises God for having "made him all to all, for the salvation of souls," and prays that by following "the direction of his precepts or advice," and "steeped in the sweetness of

charity, we may attain eternal life." And again in her legend of him, after our Saint has been praised for all the virtues that made him one, he receives that special eulogium which belongs singularly to himself, that "his works, filled with heavenly doctrine, shine brightly through the Church; for that in them he has pointed out a way, sure and easy, to Christian perfection." Thus does the Church recognise a peculiar commission given by divine goodness to St. Francis, of making felt "the sweetness of charity," and leading men to salvation by this path, rather than by that of austerity and penance.

It may be said that he took the first step on that glorious, and royal high way, on which his friend St. Vincent of Paul, advanced so boldly; that Francis taught the beautiful theory which Vincent crowned by practice. And who amongst us, on reflecting, does not find, or rather feel, that he has been solidly benefited by this teaching? You, virtuous and holy souls, and we, poor repentant sinners, you who bound forward on your path with heads erect rejoicing, or we who creep forward sorrowful and dejected; do we not all feel that St. Francis, by his sweet spirit, pervading the Church, has made our way

brighter and lighter? He could not make the narrow road a wide one—God forbid! But how many unnecessary briars has he not plucked out of it, how many a heavy stone has he not rolled aside from before our feet, how many a yawning chasm has he not bridged over for our secure passage, how many a dark nook and gloomy turn he has not lighted up by his cheerful torch! He has not made meditation more easy, prayer more confident, confession less painful, communion more refreshing, scruples less annoying, temptations less formidable, the world less dangerous; the love of God more practicable and virtue more amiable? And this not only to those who have read, and who love his works, but to all catholics, through the spirit of gentle direction, and tender considerateness which has tempered and seasoned the direction of souls since his time, in spite of the insidious rigours of the Jansenistic period.

And now coming to the precious little volume before us, we could desire no better proof of the accuracy with which the orally delivered lectures contained in it, have been recorded, than this: that every page breathes the spirit of St. Francis as fully as that Philothea of which an English

protestant monarch expressed his judgment, by peevishly wondering why none of *his* bishops could write anything like that. As St. John's spirit imparts its sweet flavour to his shortest writing, so does that of St. Francis betray itself in his most familiar compositions.

Let us try to analyse the almost impalpable materials which compose this delicious essence.

The spirit of St. Francis is a spirit of sweetness. This is the most recognisable, the most obvious of its qualities. It associates itself, in our minds, with his name. One drop of bitterness or of acidity, in a whole volume, would be sufficient to make us reject it, as none of his. It is not the universal blandness assumed by the courtier, a smile for all, which may cover resentment or contempt, or is only a mask for selfishness and self-complacency. It is not the softness of a weak and yielding mind, that has no strength of principle, or of feeling, and shows no strong emotions, because it has no distinct perceptions. There never was any one with greater clearness of judgment as to good and evil, or a more firm determination of what *is* good and loveable, what *is* evil and odious. And yet when expressing himself on these,

harshness or unkindness cannot mount to his pen or his tongue.

In fact, it is the sweetness, not of manner, or of phrase, or of look, that forms this quality, but the sweetness of mind, of heart, of soul distilled through every sense and every pore: for in one word it is the suavity of charity. With what a sweetly loving eye he looks forth on nature, and culls from it his imagery. If we glance not over his pages to learn our natural history, we cannot but smile delightedly at the beautiful simplicity with which he contemplates nature, as the mirror of the spiritual world. His bees are not those of Huber, or of our gardens, they are intelligent and moral little beings; and the Saint's heart loves them, because they, like it, are ever full of honey, or busy making it, redolent always of it, and overflowing with it. How loving is the following passage: "As soon as our souls have chosen our Lord for their only king and sovereign, these powers repose like chaste mystical little bees, ranging themselves round Him, and never go out of their Hive except for the gathering of the acts of charity, which that holy King commands them to practise towards their neighbour, and immediately

after return to that most amiable modesty and holy repose, to arrange and enjoy the honey of the holy and loving conceptions and affections which they derive from His sacred presence." (p. 129.)

And as he loves the honey-bee, from a natural sympathy between theirs, and his, unceasing occupations, so does he dearly love the dove, because of their mutual resemblances in disposition. But this is no more the dove of our cotes, than the other is the bee of our hives. It is an ideal bird, that thinks, and reflects, and reasons, and is guided by the sweetest laws of disinterested love. Nay, the heart of St. Francis can understand its language, though so monotonous; to him its unwearied and unceasing cooing speaks distinct and tender sentences, worthy to be rules for a religious soul. Hence he makes this mystical tongue the subject of an entire conference. (VII.) "The laws of doves," he tells his spiritual daughters, "are all infinitely agreeable, and it is a very sweet meditation to consider them." (p. 95.) Yes truly sweet, when a Saint's sweetness makes it for us. No one but St. Francis could do it. For when he is describing the dove, he is

really describing, though unconsciously, himself "Consider," he says, "I beg of you, in the second place, how agreeable is the law of their simplicity; for our Lord Himself praises it..... But in the third place, oh my God, how agreeable is the law of their sweetness! for they are without gall and without bitterness." (p. 96.) Blessed Saint, who couldst say this of any creature, without self-reproach, without an idea that some one reading these lines might say, "he has given us here his own character, in that of the dove."

But rising above irrational illustrations, how great a favourite with him is St. Joseph, on account of his gentleness and unrepining simplicity, manifested most tenderly in his sweetness towards our B. Lady, under circumstances so painful to his love. (p. 50.) And then, how necessarily our Lord becomes the type of perfection in this his favourite quality, so that he closes his beautiful remarks on Christ's sweetness, by this conclusion: "He who prevents his neighbour with the benedictions of sweetness, is the most perfect imitator of our Lord." (p. 64.)

What does St. Francis unintentionally pronounce himself to be by these words? His

great namesake of Assisium was pronounced to have come closer to our Redeemer than any one else in abnegation, and renunciation of self: has any one come nearer than the second Francis, in the giving up of self to his neighbour? Each is a beautiful form of divine love.

Want of space prevents us from instancing our Saint's frequent illustrations drawn from children, whose little ways he had evidently learnt, through that attentiveness of affectionate observation, so often despised by lofty souls. The reader of these Conferences will find them in many places. (As pp. 65, 79, 191.) For indeed we must close this first portion of our attempt to analyse the spirit of St. Francis: and will do so with one remark. This minute attention to the very smallest fondnesses of children, belongs to a mother's heart: and he never speaks of a father's tenderness for them. *His* child always runs to the mother, never to the sterner parent. How did he note and learn this sweetest of relations between human beings? how does he apply them so accurately and minutely to the spiritual life? Through his own gentle, delicate heart. His intellect was most masculine, his bearing most manly. When

a student, he could wield his sword as bravely as, when a bishop, his pen: attacked in person, he could defend himself as courageously, as, when assailed in principles, he could vindicate them fearlessly. No; there was nothing effeminate, or weak in his constitution. His heart even was not feminine; it was not a woman's, but a mother's. Not a heart that shrank before the contemplation of sores or misery, or turned away from danger or conflict. The mother's does not, when her own child is their object. Its very tenderness of affection will make its possessor stand by, inwardly agonized, but outwardly calm, while it soothes its darling child writhing in pain, or wins it to take from her hand the bitter potion. Such is the maternal affectionateness of Francis's heart, exuberant with compassion, meekness, considerateness, gentleness, suavity, one of the few hearts, which after, or since, the Apostle's could become all to all—the child's with the child, the sufferer's with the sufferer, the rejoicer's with the rejoicer, and if not the sinner's, the penitent's, with the sinner. And so far from despising or undervaluing this delicacy of spiritual organization, as even an approach to weakness, we should

look at it with reverence and almost awe, as approaching the divine; when we remember how He who in the very context calls Himself "the Lord of hosts" (Isai. xlviii. 1.) and "the mighty One of Jacob," (xlix. 26.) yet claims as His own characteristic, the mother's heart. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if *she* should forget, yet will I not forget thee." (v. 15.) Nor can it seem to us derogatory to a Saint's dignity to seek his images of this sweetest of loves among irrational creatures, or to have them applied to his character, when his, and our, Master has used them to describe His own tenderness. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem,.....how often would I have gathered thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings." (Mat. xxiii. 37.) Is there any appeal more softly touching in the whole New Testament, than this?

The spirit of sweetness must needs be a spirit of consolation, and of encouragement: of consolation to the afflicted, the tried, the depressed, the down-hearted; of encouragement to the strong, the robust, the determined and resolute.

And such is eminently the spirit of St.

Francis. Nor could it be otherwise. For, as we have seen, his sweetness is that of charity. And charity is the Holy Spirit, whose name is the Paraclete, or the Comforter; whom the Church salutes lovingly by these titles.

> "*Consolator* optime
> *Dulcis* hospes animae
> *Dulce* refrigerium."

You see how sweetness and consolation are combined in the Spirit of God; and how can they be disjoined in the spirit of one of His Saints? If therefore our Lord pours into one of these an extraordinary portion of spiritual sweetness, He thereby infuses into him a more than ordinary grace of consoling influence—he thereby becomes himself a comforter.

And is not our St. Francis one of these? Most truly he is; as much as if, in the upper chamber of Jerusalem, he had sat beneath the waving of that divine Dove's golden pinions, as He shook from them, at every stroke, tongues of fire, soft, lambent, healing tongues; which applied to the sore, or wounded, heart, draw thence, as the flame is supposed to do for the body, the inflammation of burning passion, and soothes, then warms, with healthy temperature.

We should have to quote from every conference, and almost from every page, in this little volume, did we intend, or presume, fully to illustrate this ingredient of St. Francis's spirit. We may begin, however, by saying that his master-rule of consolation is to teach the soul how to do without it. He gently, and sweetly allays the thirst for this water, with which God softly sprinkles His young plants, till their roots have struck deep into the earth; like the olive, which sucks its fatness and its perennial sap, from the very driest rock, from the arid cinders of the volcanic bed. "Oleum de saxo durissimo."—(Deut. xxxii. 13.) He weans the delicate and sensitive soul from that infant's milk, to the solid food of the adult, the meat of the strong.

We have described the spirit of a Saint as a compound too fine and ætherial, to bear exact separation into parts: the ingredients are too thoroughly blended by nice affinities to be separated. And so here the spirit of consolation mingles itself most homogeneously with the spirit of generosity, of which we shall have later to say a few words. By infusing this noble sentiment into the soul, it becomes invigorated, and so heedless of consolation. It is raised to

loving God from purer, and serving Him for higher, motives. And thus the office of consolation becomes that of encouragement; the hand that led at the beginning of the race is wanted now, to applaud its quicker progress towards the goal.

But at the beginning there are shackles on the limbs, and weights on the frame, which must be shaken off, or removed, before we can run freely. And here, indeed, our Saint comes wonderfully to our assistance. There are many anxieties, and scruples, which beset every one in his spiritual life, especially in youth, perplexing the conscience and disturbing it with apprehensions of sin. There is a bird so timid, that the shadow of a cloud passing over head drives it, to seek shelter, into any hole in the earth: so there the fowler has set his device for its destruction; and the foolish little thing runs into a real danger, to escape from an imaginary one. And so it may befall weak and pusillanimous souls.

For such, St. Francis, in these Conferences, is admirable. And as they are to be found not only in the Visitation, not only in religion, not only in colleges and schools, but in the family.

in the world, we say unhesitatingly that this little work is a present that must be acceptable to catholic readers of every class. Let us illustrate this assertion, by examples.

And first let us remark, how the Saint repeatedly explains the important distinction between the superior and inferior region of the soul. The one is the throne of reason, the dwelling of the will, the seat of our nobler affections. It is the firmament raised above the sphere of mists and clouds, whirlwinds and tempests, that is of our lower appetites, meaner desires, evil or imperfect affections. The upper sky is kept secure and pure by our love of God, habitual direction of all our wishes and thoughts to Him, persevering and unretracted union of ourselves and of our operations, interior and exterior, with Him, by singleness of intention. Now all the tumult and irregularity that is beneath may sweep across the face of what is above it, may blot it, obscure it, disfigure it to the eye, but it does not reach it, it does not disturb it. It keeps all below, it is outward to it, as the object which seems inside the lens, or pupil, of the eye. Thousands of such, and even foul ones may pass in succession before that

delicate mirror, and it is not thereby defiled, or robbed of its delicate sensibility. This distinction so pervades the entire book, that it is unnecessary to quote specific passages. (See p. 78.)

What is more annoying and discouraging than the difficulty of keeping the mind undistracted, recollected, united with God? Yet how does St. Francis treat this sense of imperfection? Among many other consoling ways, as follows; "that is not what you ask, I see plainly; but how you can so fix your mind on God, that nothing may be able to detach or withdraw it from Him. Two things are necessary for this, to die and to be saved." (p. 138.)

And soon after he goes on to say: "Pardon me, my daughter; the least fly of a distraction does not withdraw your mind from God, as you say, for nothing withdraws us from God except sin; and the resolution we have made in the morning of keeping our spirit united to God, and attentive to His presence, makes us remain in it always, even while we sleep; since we do it in the name of God, and according to His most holy will."

And so of repeated infidelities in our desire to persevere, and in our religious practices, "I

do not call it failing in perseverance, when we make some little interruptions, provided that we do not give up entirely."—(p. 148.)

Again, how painful to a willing heart, to find a repugnance to the performance of a duty. It almost drives to despair. It makes us feel as if it were better not to do it—it seems so worthless, nay so hypocritical even. Hear how light St. Francis makes of it. "But I wish you to remark that when I say we must labour, I always mean with the superior part of our soul; for all the repugnances of the inferior part, we must not be more disturbed at them, than the passers by are at the dogs that bark at a distance."—(p. 141.)

Similar to repugnances, are aversions. These affect persons, as those do duties. We may easily find directors who would not absolve us, if we confessed an aversion for one who had done nothing to deserve it, or even for one who had. St Francis gives us an entire Conference, (XVI.) on this subject, and it is most lenient and consoling. "What remedy," he asks, "is there for these aversions, since no one, however perfect he may be, can be exempt from them?" (p. 248.) And he replies, "The only remedy

for this evil, as for every sort of temptation, is a simple diversion, I mean, not to think of it." Then after some very simple explanations of wilful indulgence, and simple feeling, of aversion, he thus wisely concludes, "Now when we do no more to favour our aversions, than speaking a little less agreeably than we should do to a person for whom we had a great feeling of affection, it is no great thing; it is hardly in our power to do otherwise, and while we are under the influence of this passion, it would be wrong to require it of us." (p. 249.)

Somewhat similar to this trial is the repugnance we have to be reproved, or set right, especially by those whose duty it is not to correct us. On this subject St. Francis remarks: "Taking everything into account, there is nobody who is not averse to correction." And he instances St. Pacomius, and St. Francis. How true is this experience of human nature, and how considerate his way of dealing with it! Listen to his kind and encouraging words. How lightly he taxes poor humanity, in them! "You desire, in the second place, to know how to receive correction well, without its leaving uneasiness, or dryness of heart. To prevent

any feeling of anger being stirred in us, or the colour rising to our cheeks, that can never be done. Happy shall we be if we can attain to this perfection a quarter of an hour before we die." (p. 133.)

Let us remember that a Saint writes this who had completely mastered all passion and subdued self: and that, in instructing religious who aspired to perfection. There are few who may not derive comfort from this gentle guidance.

And here we will remark, as it will be impossible for us to detach and describe separately, many of the impalpable elements which compose the delicate flavour of our Saint's precious spirit, that, at first sight, this sweetness and its accompanying consolations, might be supposed to be combined with some degree of weakness and indecision. Yet this is not so, but quite the contrary. St. Francis is always master of the principles on which he decides; and acts upon them definitely.

For example, in doubts and hesitations about partial consent to long temptations, a weak mind, directing or directed, has recourse to the comfort of general accusations, and dubious self-reproaches, as a remedy. St. Francis pro-

scribes this compromise; and does not hesitate to forbid the practice. The entire passages should be read, as they afford most useful instruction, as well as solid comfort. We will only give a few detached sentences. "It is not to the purpose to say that we accuse ourselves of having had several emotions of anger, of sadness, and so of the rest; for anger and sadness are passions, and their emotions are not sins, inasmuch as it is not in our power to prevent them. The anger must be unruly, or lead us to unruly actions, to be a sin." (p. 245.) Again—

"Do not bring into your confession any useless accusations. You have had imperfect thoughts about your neighbour, thoughts of vanity, or even worse ones; you have had distractions in your prayers; if you have dwelt upon them deliberately, say so honestly, and do not content yourself with saying that you have not taken sufficient care to keep yourself recollected during the time of prayer; but if you have been negligent in dismissing a distraction say so, for those general accusations are to no purpose in confession." (p. 246.) Finally, "You tell me now that when you have had some great feeling of anger, or any other temptation, you

always have a scruple if you do not confess it. I say that you must tell it in your review, but not in the way of confession." (p. 79.)

We have already intimated that generosity enters largely into the composition of our Saint's spirit. But generosity, in his language, is very different from what it sounds in the mouth of others; and on this account we must be allowed to say a few words upon it. Generally speaking, we associate generosity with a certain greatness, or rather grandeur, of soul. It becomes almost akin to pride, in our mental associations. We think this vice to be the danger, the temptation, of the generous mind.

But in our dear Saint's scheme of virtues, it is exactly the contrary. It sounds almost a paradox, when we find him declaring such a danger to be impossible. Generosity and pride are incompatibles; they cannot co-exist, according to him. And why? "You see then," he observes, "that these two virtues of humility and generosity, are so united and joined to each other, that they never are and never can be separated." (p. 70.) Now the reasoning by which he reaches this conclusion is of almost mathematical accuracy, and the encouraging

deductions which he draws from it are a series of beautiful maxims for the spiritual life.

While St. Francis teaches us to despise all goods apparent in ourselves as from ourselves, such as are perishable, transitory, and dependent on others, or otherwise fortuitous, and in this places humility, he instructs us highly to value the direct gifts of God, such as faith, hope, and charity, "goods in us but not of us," as also vocation, and "a certain capacity of uniting ourselves to Him, by means of grace." And in our consciousness of the possession of these gifts, and our determination to devote ourselves, through them, entirely to God, he places generosity. "Humility thinks it can do nothing... and on the contrary, generosity makes us say with St. Paul, 'I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.' Humility makes us distrust ourselves; and generosity makes us trust in God." (p. 69.)

We need hardly say how variously this beautiful view goes far beyond its immediate application here. It reconciles with humility the consciousness of intellectual and other mental qualities, when they are recognised as simple gifts of God, and dedicated and devoted gene-

rously to Him. Indeed the more they are cultivated in this spirit—their objects infinitely varying—the more do deficiencies and imperfections become sensitively felt, and the more is humility forced upon the soul; as the brighter we make a fire, kindled at the mouth of a deep pit or cavern, the deeper and intenser we cause its darkness to appear. Many, we well know, are perplexed and troubled by the difficulty of uniting these two conflicting feelings, that they are nothing, and that yet they are really a great deal. On the contrary, there is much more to fear from that humility which pretends to exclude knowledge of what is plain to others, and so cannot be concealed from inward conviction. "That humility," says our saint, "which does not produce generosity, is undoubtedly false."

The generous willingness to undertake duties and occupations beyond our strength is supported with comforting consistency by St. Francis, who never shrinks from the legitimate consequences of his principles. He thus applies them, when treating of hope, to a particular case. "If you have no virtue, or perceive none in yourself, do not disturb yourself; for if, for the glory of God, or to satisfy obedience, you undertake the guid-

ance of souls, or any other exercise, whatever it may be, God will take care of you, and will be bound to provide you with all that may be necessary, as well for you as for those whom God will put under your charge. It is true, that what you are undertaking is a thing of great consequence and great importance; but yet you would be wrong if you did not hope for good success, seeing that you do not undertake it by your own choice, but to comply with obedience." (p. 85.)

How truly consoling and encouraging to the bishop, to the priest, to the monk, and often to the layman, as well as to the nun, must this doctrine, of generous abandonment of our wills to God, often prove.

We must unite together two other, similar but distinct, ingredients of the sweet spirit of St. Francis; observing that we are obliged to omit even mention of many, which the devout reader will easily discover.

These two qualities are considerateness and discernment. The first of them leavens the whole work, and all the Saint's direction. The frailties, the weaknesses, the peculiarities of temper, disposition, and even physical nature

of different persons to whom his instruction has to be applicable, never for a moment escape him. With his prudence and tact, which practical experience in this sublime art of spiritual direction can alone fully make us appreciate, there is no danger of error or oversight. His counsels are so well-balanced, that we cannot recollect an instance of an advice, by which any one could be possibly led into trouble. For example, never could one say in reading these Conferences, "this will not apply to me, who am weak, or timid, or not accomplished, or poor in spiritual or mental gifts:" nor on the other hand, "this is meant for persons of not so cultivated a mind, or such long experience especially in office, as it has pleased Almighty God to bestow on me." No; everything in these charming Conferences is so well adjusted and averaged, that they will be read with equal pleasure and profit by the most illiterate lay sister or tourière who can barely spell them out, and by the most highly educated choir nun; by the youthful novice, and by the venerable jubilarian. There is not a line that will encourage the ardent and aspiring to overstep the prescriptions of rule, by voluntary austerities or extraneous devotions,

or that will depress the feebler or fainthearted to droop below the level-line of full and generous observance. To check and to cheer, firmly to curb, and gently to spur, to keep all together, as one body, which may move and apply its different limbs variously, for the performance of individual functions, but has no power of advance or retreat—of locomotion, piecemeal, but must move on together as a unity and a whole —such is the tendency of the entire treatise.

Any community, formed and trained upon its principles, must advance by a uniform and combined movement towards aggregate, which is far more valuable than individual, perfection; without perceptible prominences or depressions, that is without any member to be pointed out as rising signally above others in religious holiness, or as lagging behind in the performance of duty. How much better is a religious house, of which it is said, "that is a holy Community," than one of which it is whispered; "in that Convent there are some nuns who are quite saints." This is St. Francis's great aim, to train not one or two holy women up to great perfection, but an aggregate of such handmaids of God, and spouses of the Lamb, so

prepared, as that from their number the Almighty may at any time choose such as He sees fit to walk more close to Him, and to be singled out for that sublimer perfection, which one scarcely may dare to covet.

Hence, as we have intimated, he resolutely sets himself against any extraordinary, however secret, performances, especially in all that belongs to penance and mortification. His admirable Conference (XIII.) "on the spirit of the Rule" is most decisive on this subject. He thus defines "the particular spirit of the Visitation." "I have always judged that it was a spirit of profound humility towards God, and of great sweetness towards our neighbour; so that having less bodily austerity, there must be more sweetness of heart." (p. 202.) This principle is admirably illustrated, in a way which brings out the considerateness of St. Francis, for those whose infirmities will not allow them to enter other orders. But we must not deny ourselves the satisfaction of quoting a few lines further on. Thus does the holy bishop speak. "If a sister should be so generous and courageous as to want to arrive at perfection in a quarter of an hour, by doing

more than the community, I should advise her to humble herself and submit to be perfect in three days, going on like the others. And if there should be sisters of strong and robust constitutions, so much the better, yet they must not want to go quicker than those who are weak." (p. 203.)

It required no small resolution and determinateness of principle to speak thus. The founder and head of an institute, like this, naturally desires, and rejoices, to see his spiritual daughters springing forward, bounding like the roe on the way of perfection, and some foremost in the race, leaders, examples, forerunners of the rest, like John running before, and quicker than Peter, to find his Lord. But St. Francis, all to all, to the weak as to the strong, had no partialities in his spirit, no preferences: he admired, no doubt, that part of John's modest conduct, when he checked his youthful speed, and paused till Peter overtook him, that so they might enter in together where Jesus had reposed. And so "the strong and robust" must not put the weak to shame, by "going quicker." The entire body must move together, and reach heaven hand in hand.

Hence he considers nothing too minute or too common to be beneath his notice or instruction. For example, he descends to prescribing rules for recreation and conversation, and they are simple and practical; thus, "I answer you that in this as in all other actions, you must have a holy liberty, and freedom to converse upon subjects that serve to keep up the spirit of joy and recreation." (p. 187.)

How sensible is his injunction to avoid "the vice of stupidity," and not learning what is necessary. (p. 128.)

He does not command the rejection of natural affections, and social courtesies, but only their being always kept under proper rule and command. What considerateness there is in the following words: "Then too the natural love of relationship, of appearances, of politeness, of intercourse, of sympathy, of graces, will be purified and reduced to the perfect obedience of the pure love of the Divine good pleasure."—(p. 195.)

Every page could furnish examples of this spirit of considerateness, and at the same time of discernment, which applies it. For, this quality consists in a singular perspicacity and

minuteness of observation, such as we have remarked St. Francis displays of the little ways of children. Far more is this exhibited by him when he treats of, and with, his spiritual family. He seems to have overheard every possible dialogue between a superior and any one of her subjects, whether scrupulous, or, to use a homely word, fidgetty, or ardent, or desponding, or clever, or dull, or deluded. In every mood he knows what the one must have said, and what the other ought to have answered. He has somehow listened invisible to the sisters talking together, in recreation, in their offices, in the infirmary; and he repeats with graphic simplicity their conversation, with occasionally its unconscious arts, springing from yet unconquered natural propensities, little remnants of self—self-esteem, self-respect, or perhaps self-love, in its more innocent forms. But still more, he has stolen into their hearts, by a secret and tender sympathy, instinctive to him. He has read their thoughts, with a loving eye, their aspirations, their hesitations, their anxieties, their secret trials. He has looked under those delicate folds, which shelter failings or defects, imperceptible to their owners, and with

a gentle and skilful hand has drawn them out. We feel confident that not a single silent excuse, or unspoken suggestion of imperfect virtue, has escaped his notice.

Hence he is always ready to make allowances, to frame excuses, to plead for human weaknesses, which one with less discernment would never have known, and one with less sweetness and compassion would not so amiably have spared. One of the qualities of his spirit thus always returns to unite with the others in harmonious combination; were any one absent, we should not have the spirit of St. Francis.

Let us now lightly touch upon the last characteristic of this admirable spirit, which we can afford room for. The spirit of St. Francis de Sales is eminently a spirit of wisdom. For certainly all that we have written will have been written in vain, if our readers have not recognised in it a superhuman prudence. And what is this but wisdom? moderation, avoidance of extremes, adaptation to all circumstances, selection of means to answer all characters and positions, these constitute a wisdom difficult and uncommon.

But we now use the word wisdom in a higher

sense. When principles and maxims are found sufficiently wide and deep, to reach every class, and penetrate to whatever sphere, of men and of things, for the benefit of the one and the improvement of the other, they form, in the best sense, a code of wisdom. Universality of application of what is good, universality in time, universality in place, stamp on it the seal of wisdom. Astronomy, physiology, medicine have changed again and again—they constitute science, not wisdom. But the sentences written by Hebrew sages, their proverbs, and their aphorisms, we call "Books of wisdom." For they are as true and as applicable in the Europe of to-day, as they were in the Asia of 3000 years ago.

And such is the wisdom of St. Francis. Nothing would be easier than to reduce it to the form of spiritual axioms, universally applicable to the end of time. Indeed so true is this, that he himself has to a certain extent done it for us. Certainly without intending to be sententious, than which nothing can be more removed from his thought and style, he has often thrown his counsels and observations into a condensed form, like a drop from an alembic which contains the distilled virtue of

many flowers. They are what, in oriental phrase, would be called his pearls. A very few examples must suffice to explain our meaning.

"I am accustomed to say, that our misery is the throne of God's mercy; the greater is our misery, the greater should be our confidence."—(p. 24.) Many beautiful thoughts will spring up from this illustration. For the greatness of the throne will be proportioned to the greatness of what it has to bear. The larger the throne of our humility, built by ourselves, the greater the majesty of Divine Mercy that will occupy it; and so the more abundant our motives of confidence in it.

"Desire nothing, refuse nothing."—(p. 330.) "Ask for nothing, and refuse nothing."—(p. 86.) A condensation of his doctrine of humility and generosity.

"Charity is an ascending humility, and humility is a descending charity."—(p. 121.) This sentence contains wisdom enough for a treatise, on the alliance between these two greatest of virtues.

"There is a great difference between the absence of a vice and the possession of a contrary virtue."—(p. 252.) "Virtue is a good

in itself, which does not depend on the absence or its opposite."—(p. 146.) Maxims worthy of a great and profitable development, and affording matter for much practical reflection.

"There are laws which are justly unjust."—(p. 213.) The Saint himself admirably comments on this wise apophthegm

And now our labour of love is closed. We might perhaps have spared our readers so long a perusal, by referring them to the supreme judgment of the Church, who tells us that St. Francis gave to the Visitation, "constitutions wonderful for their wisdom, discretion, and sweetness." And do not these words describe the ingredients into which we have tried to resolve the spirit of his conferences? It will be obvious, and indeed it has been already remarked, that we have not treated of the virtues, but only of the spirit, of St. Francis. No doubt his spirit could not have existed without the virtues which made him a Saint. His humility, his meekness, his piety, his charity were heroic: the qualities of his peculiar spirit were peculiar gifts superadded to these, or sweet emanations from them, peculiarly his own.

This little book, therefore, has our hearty

blessing, we dare not add, our approbati is from our glorious Fellow-bishop and Saint, that *we* must humbly entreat appro of what we have presumed to write conce him and his work. If it shall prove of be to others, religious or secular, we shall feel t he has deigned to look down upon our humbi labour, undertaken for love of him, after God, whose glory, with him, we devoutly seek to promote, and has blessed it. May his spirit with his mantle descend upon us, his sweetness particularly and his humility—a double spirit, to none more necessary in the Church than to bishops, to none more wanting among bishops than to us.

To all religious we recommend this work most lovingly; to those whom we are allowed to address as our spiritual daughters, with paternal, to others with a most kindly, affection. From all we earnestly solicit fervent prayers, for our many wants, and for the necessities of our Flock, and for the alleviation of the tribulations that afflict the Universal Church, and its venerable Head.

N. CARD. WISEMAN.

London, May 14, 1862.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

INTRODUCTORY LETTER 1

CONFERENCE I.

THE CONSTITUTIONS.

In which the obligation of the Constitutions of the Visitation of Holy Mary is explained, and the qualities of the devotion which the religious of the said Order should have 7

CONFERENCE II.

CONFIDENCE.

In which it is asked whether we may go to God with great confidence, even having the sentiment of our misery, and how. And of the perfect abandonment of ourselves 21

CONFERENCE III.

FIRMNESS.

On the flight of our Lord into Egypt, treating of the firmness we should have amidst the accidents of the world 32

CONFERENCE IV.

CORDIALITY.

In which it is asked how the sisters ought to love one another with a cordial love, yet without too much familiarity. And on the spirit of humility 54

CONTENTS.

CONFERENCE V.

PAGE

GENEROSITY 68

CONFERENCE VI.

HOPE.

On the departure of the Sisters of the Visitation, who were going to found a new House of their Institute.. 80

CONFERENCE VII.

THREE SPIRITUAL LAWS.

In which the properties of the dove are applied to the religious soul in the form of laws 95

CONFERENCE VIII.

DISAPPROPRIATION.

On disappropriation and despoiling ourselves of all things .. 112

CONFERENCE IX.

MODESTY.

Which treats of the manner of receiving reproofs, and of the means of so establishing ourselves in God, that nothing can turn us from Him 122

CONFERENCE X.

OBEDIENCE 145

CONFERENCE XI.

THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE. 155

CONFERENCE XII.

SIMPLICITY.

PAGE
On religious simplicity and prudence 181

CONFERENCE XIII.

THE SPIRIT OF THE RULES.

On the rules and the spirit of the Visitation 197

CONFERENCE XIV.

PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

Against private judgment and tenderness towards oneself .. 214

CONFERENCE XV.

THE WILL OF GOD.

In which it is asked in what consists the perfect determination to regard and to follow the will of God in all things; and whether we can find and follow it in the wills of our superiors, equals, or inferiors, which we see preceed from their natural or habitual inclinations. And on some notable points concerning confessors and preachers. 233

CONFERENCE XVI.

AVERSIONS.

Concerning aversions; how we should receive books; and that we should not be astonished to see imperfections in religious persons, and even in superiors 247

CONFERENCE XVII.

VOTES.

In which it is asked how and from what motive we must give our vote to the sisters who are to be admitted to profession, as well as to those who are to be received into the noviciate .. 261

CONFERENCE XVIII.

THE SACRAMENTS. PAGE

How the Sacraments are to be received, and the holy Office recited; with some points regarding prayer 279

CONFERENCE XIX.

VIRTUES OF ST. JOSEPH 294

CONFERENCE XX.

INTENTION IN ENTERING RELIGION.

In which it is asked what intention we should have in entering religion 313

CONFERENCE XXI.

ASK FOR NOTHING.

On the maxim of asking for nothing and refusing nothing .. 324

Vive ✠ Jesus.

TO OUR

DEAR SISTERS IN OUR LORD,

OUR RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF THE

VISITATION OF HOLY MARY.

Very dear Sisters,

These are the true Conferences which our Blessed Father held with us at various times and on different occasions. We used to recollect them carefully, and to write them down after he had finished them; and as they were then fresh in our memory, and each of our Sisters related her part, we endeavoured, in putting together the fragments, to arrange them in the best way we could, so as to form a whole. We confess, nevertheless, (what every one will readily believe of a work that has passed through hands so unworthy as ours,) that in spite of all our care and diligence, we have not been able to make this collection so

exactly as to avoid losing many excellent things; and that those which we have retained have also lost much of their force, and of the advantage of being spoken by so worthy and venerable a person. However we may be permitted to say with all truth, that a great part of the lessons which he gave us are here so simply and so faithfully related, that any one who has had the happiness of hearing him, or who is versed in his writings, will at once recognize his spirit, and will have no difficulty in placing these Conferences, if not in the rank of the other works which issued immediately from his hands, at least in the rank of those which have in some way the honour of belonging to him. If they are not arranged like the rest of his books; if the discourses are not so connected; if anything appears less worthy of his eminent learning and of the reputation acquired by his other works, it is not to be wondered at; for they have never been seen nor read by him. And you know that infants weaned before the time from their mother's breast, do not thrive so well as those that are well nursed; and people always take compassion on children born after their father's death. This Blessed Father of our souls certainly never imagined that his familiar conferences were to be known beyond our parlour, where he answered our little questions with incredible simplicity. Neither was it our intention to make them public, but merely to

preserve them in writing for the private consolation of our houses, for which they were designed. But since it has happened (we know not how,) that they have been printed without our knowledge, with many notable omissions, and in very bad condition, and this having been seen by the Bishop of Geneva, the worthy brother and successor of that blessed Prelate, he obtained the privilege hereinafter mentioned, and thinking that the reputation of his holy brother was concerned, he commanded us to make quickly a true copy, in order to remedy the evil of this bad edition, and to show clearly what had been collected in this monastery. We are certainly willing to believe that our neighbour was induced to publish them rather by a well-meaning zeal than by any other motive; but our indulgence cannot prevent our complaining charitably of him, not for having taken from us what seemed to be ours, (for we have nothing of our own, and spiritual things still less than others, because they ought to be more communicated,) but for having seized these conferences in such a manner, that dragging them away with difficulty, he could not help tearing them to pieces, and giving them out in shreds, as he had taken them; and they had even been copied and re-copied several times by Sisters who had added many little things picked up here and there, which had been said to individuals, but from want of memory, not as our Blessed Father

said them. In consequence of which, he who took them, was obliged to supply the place of what was wanting, by many extraneous things which he has added to connect the discourses; and all this has so changed the work that it is hardly to be recognized, as may be easily seen by comparing the two editions. It has therefore been necessary, very dear Sisters, to communicate these conferences first to those to whom we are subject, and of whom we ought to take counsel, and they having taken the trouble to correct the faults that had been contracted under our hands, we have brought them to light, and given them to the public in the form in which they might with truth bear the name of Conferences of our Blessed Father. Perhaps you may find in them some things intended so exclusively for our houses that you may not think them fit to be published freely, the spirit of the world not being always disposed to receive pious writings with the simplicity and reverence which are due to them. Nevertheless, as it was always one of the salutary counsels and desires of our Blessed Father, Institutor, and Founder, which he declared to us in one of his conferences, that the spirit of our houses should be imparted to our neighbour; that we may therefore not deprive him of the fruit of the holy instructions that we have received, obedience and charity compel us to make them known to the public. It

is also right that they should be particularly dedicated to us, to whom they especially belong; since it was to us that our Blessed Father gave them. Let us all enjoy together these useful and agreeable conferences; let us keep ourselves in the spirit of our Rule by frequently and attentively reading them, but above all by faithfully practising the holy teaching contained in them; and in proportion as we exteriorly express them, let us imprint them deeply in our hearts, so that they may never be effaced, and we may not one day be obliged to give account of our not having made so precious a talent profitable. We hope that our Blessed Father, through whose hands we received it from Our Lord, will obtain from His divine goodness the power to employ it well, and to make use of it for His glory, and for the good of our souls. This is our continual desire for you, very dear Sisters, and for ourselves, who are in Jesus Christ,

Your very humble and affectionate sisters and servants, the Religious of the Monastery of the Visitation of Holy Mary of Annecy.

Dieu soit beni.

Annecy, 1629

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES

OF

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES

CONFERENCE I.

THE CONSTITUTIONS.

In which the obligation of the Constitutions of the Visitation of Holy Mary is explained, and the qualities of the devotion which the religious of the said Order should have.

These Constitutions do not of themselves oblige in any way under sin, whether mortal or venial, and they are only given for the direction and guidance of members of the Congregation: but nevertheless, if any one should wilfully and intentionally violate them, with contempt or with scandal, either of the sisters or of strangers, she would without doubt commit a great offence; for it would be impossible to exempt from fault one who disgraces and dishonours the things of God, contradicts her profession, overthrows the Congregation, and dissipates the fruits of good example and of good odour which she should produce towards her neighbour. Voluntary contempt of this kind would therefore be followed at length by some great chastisement from Heaven, and particularly by the privation of the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are

usually taken away from such as abandon their good purposes, and leave the path in which God has placed them.

Now contempt of the Constitutions, as well as that of all good works, may be distinguished by the following considerations.

That person is guilty of it who violates or neglects some rule, not only voluntarily but with especial purpose, because if he violates it through inadvertence, forgetfulness, or the surprise of some passion, that is a different thing: for contempt includes in itself a deliberate will which purposely determines to act in that manner. Therefore it follows that whoever violates the Rule, or disobeys through contempt, not only disobeys but intends to disobey, he not only commits an act of disobedience, but he commits it with the purpose of being disobedient. It is forbidden to eat out of meal-times; a sister eats some plums, some apricots, or other fruit; she violates the rule and is disobedient. Now if she eats, attracted by the pleasure which she expects to receive therefrom, she disobeys, not out of disobedience, but out of greediness; but if she eats because she sets no value upon the Rule, and will not either regard it, or submit herself to it, she disobeys out of contempt and disobedience.

It also follows that whoever disobeys in consequence of a temptation, or through the force of some sudden passion, would be glad to be able to satisfy his passion without disobeying, and that while he takes pleasure, for instance, in eating, he is at the same time sorry to be disobedient: in which case the disobedience follows or accompanies the deed, but in the other the disobedience precedes it, and is both the cause and the motive

of it, although through greediness. For whoever eats at forbidden times, is thereby, or at that moment guilty of disobedience, although he would be glad to avoid it, were it possible to eat without being so: as a person who drinks to excess, would willingly avoid intoxicating himself, although in drinking he does so. But he who eats out of contempt for the Rule, and through disobedience, intends the disobedience itself; so that he would neither commit the act, nor wish to commit it, if he were not impelled to do so by the desire which he has of being disobedient. One therefore disobeys because he desires something which obedience has forbidden him; and the other disobeys desiring the same thing, but desiring it only because it is forbidden. One is disobedient in the pursuit of his object, and would prefer not to be so; and the other seeks the disobedience itself in the act, and would not desire to do it were it not disobedient. One says: "I disobey because I wish to eat this fruit, which I cannot do without disobeying;" and the other says: "I eat it because I wish to disobey, which I shall do by eating." Disobedience and contempt follow the one, and lead the other.

Now this formal disobedience, and this contempt of good and holy things, is never without some sin, at least venial, even when the things themselves are only counsels. For although it is quite possible without any sin to choose other things rather than to follow holy counsels, it is impossible to neglect them through contempt without guilt; because, though we are not bound to follow everything that is good, we are bound to honour and esteem it, and therefore with still more reason to avoid despising and depreciating it.

Further, it follows that whoever violates the Rule and Constitutions out of contempt, considers them despicable and useless, which is in itself great presumption and temerity; or if he considers them to be useful, and yet will not submit himself to them, then he gives us his former purpose to the injury of his neighbour, to whom he gives scandal and bad example; while he breaks the engagement and the promise he made to the community, and brings disorder into a religious house, and these are very great faults.

The following are some signs by which to discover when any one violates the Rules or disobeys through contempt:

1. When on being corrected he shows scorn and no repentance.

2. When he continues without testifying any desire or will to amend.

3. When he maintains that the Rule or command is unsuitable.

4. When he endeavours to draw others into the same fault, and to quiet their fears by telling them it is nothing, and that there is no harm in it.

These signs, however, are not quite certain, as they sometimes arise from other causes besides contempt. For it may happen that a person turns into ridicule one who is reproving him, on account of the little esteem in which he holds him, that he perseveres in his fault through infirmity, that he disputes out of spite and anger, and that he corrupts others in order to have companions, and to excuse his own fault. Nevertheless, it is easy to judge by the circumstances when all this is done out of contempt, because audacity and open rebellion in the end are the ordinary consequences of con-

tempt; and those who have it in their hearts, will at length express it with their lips, and say (as the Prophet David remarks:) "Who is Lord over us?"*

I must add one word about a temptation which might arise on this head. It is that sometimes a person does not consider himself disobedient or rebellious, when he only despises one or two Rules which seem to him of little importance, provided that he observes all the others. But who does not see that this is an illusion? Because what one person esteems very little, another will prize highly, and the reverse. In like manner, when in a community one person neglects or despises one rule, a second another, and a third person some other, everything will fall into confusion. For what can result when the human spirit is guided solely by its own inclinations and aversions, but perpetual changes, and a variety of faults? Yesterday I was joyous, silence displeased me, and I was tempted to think myself idle; to-day, that I am melancholy, I shall think that the recreation and conference are still more useless. Yesterday, when I was in consolation I liked singing; to-day, that I am in a state of aridity it will displease me, and so of the rest.

Therefore, it is necessary that whoever wishes to live happily and perfectly should accustom himself to live according to reason, to the Rules and obedience, not according to his own inclinations and aversions; that he should esteem all the Rules, and that he should honour them and cherish them, at least in his superior will. Because if he now despises one, to-morrow he will de-

* Ps. xl.

spise another, the next day again another: and when once the bonds of duty are broken, all that was bound together by them is by little and little scattered and dissipated.

God forbid that any daughter of the Visitation should ever wander so far out of the path of the love of God, as to lose herself in this contempt of the Rules through disobedience, or hardness and obstinacy of heart. For what greater or worse misfortune could happen to her? especially as there are so few Rules which are peculiar or proper to the Congregation; the greater part of them, or nearly all, being either general precepts which they would have had to observe in their own homes in the world, if they desired to live in the fear of God, and with any honour and reputation, or else Rules which evidently concern the propriety of a religious house, or the duties of the individual offices.

If it should sometimes happen that they feel any dislike or aversion to the Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation, they must behave as they would do in regard to other temptations, correcting the aversion they feel, by reasoning, and by a good and firm resolution in the superior part of their soul; expecting that God will send them consolation on their road, and will show them (as He did to Jacob when he was tired and weary with his journey) that the manner or rule of life which they have embraced is the true ladder, by which, like angels, they are to mount to God through charity, and to descend into themselves through humility.

But if, without aversion, they should break the Rule through infirmity, then they must immediately humble themselves before our Lord, beg pardon of Him and renew their resolution of observing this very rule, and

above all they must take care not to allow themselves to be discouraged or disturbed, but with renewed confidence in God, they shall return to His holy love.

And as to the infractions of the Rule which are not done through pure disobedience, nor through contempt; if they are done out of carelessness, infirmity, temptation, or negligence, they may and should be confessed as venial sins, or as matters in which there may have been venial sin. Because although there is no sort of sin in virtue of the obligation of the Rule, nevertheless there might be because of the negligence, carelessness, precipitation, and such like defects; for it can rarely happen that we should know of a good thing useful to our advancement, and be moreover invited and called to embrace it, and yet neglect it without offending, because such neglect only proceeds from inattention, depraved affection, or want of fervour. And if we have to give an account of really idle words, how much more of having rendered idle and useless the invitation which the Rule made us to put it in practice. I have said that it rarely happens that we do not offend God when we omit doing something which is favourable to our advancement, because it might be that we omitted it involuntarily, through forgetfulness, inadvertence, or surprise; and then there is no sin, either great or small, unless the thing which we forgot was of such importance that we were bound to keep it in mind so as not to forget it either through inadvertence or surprise. As, for example, when a sister breaks the silence because she is paying no attention to it, and therefore does not remember that it is silence time, but was thinking of other things; or else when she is seized

by a desire to say something, and speaks almost before she thought of repressing it, she certainly does not sin; because the observance of silence is not of such great importance as to oblige us to devote so much attention to it as never to forget. But, on the contrary, as it is a very good thing to occupy oneself during silence with other good and holy thoughts, if our attention to these causes the forgetfulness of the silence, this forgetfulness having such a good source cannot be evil, nor can the failing against silence which proceeds from it.

But if she forgot to serve a sick person who through her negligence was in danger, and if this service had been entrusted to her, and she was relied upon to perform it, it would not be a good excuse to say, I did not think of it, I forgot it. No, because the thing was of such great importance that it was necessary to keep so attentive as not to forget it or neglect it; and the want of this attention could not be excused, considering the importance of the matter, which deserved attention.

We must believe that in proportion as divine love increases in the souls of the sisters of the congregation, it will render them more and more exact and careful in the observance of their Constitutions, although of themselves they do not oblige under pain of sin either mortal or venial: because if they obliged under pain of death, how closely they would be observed! But love is strong as death: therefore the attractions of love are as powerful towards the execution of a resolution as the menaces of death. Zeal, or "jealousy," as the Canticle of Canticles says, "is hard as hell." * Souls, then, which have zeal will do in virtue of it as much or

* Cant. viii. 6.

more than they would from fear of hell; so that the sisters of the Congregation will, from the sweet violence of love, observe their Rule with God's help as exactly as if they were bound to it under pain of eternal damnation.

In short, they will always remember what Solomon says in the Proverbs, "He that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul; but he that neglecteth his own way shall die."* Now your way is the sort of life in which God has placed you. I say nothing here of the obligation we are under to observe our vows; for it is quite evident that whoever absolutely transgresses the Rule and the essential vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, commits mortal sin; and the same by breaking enclosure.

Let the sisters make a particular profession of nourishing in their hearts an intimate, strong, and generous devotion. I say intimate, so that their will may be conformed to the exterior good actions which they do, whether great or small; that nothing may be done from custom, but by choice and application of the will; and if the exterior action sometimes precedes the interior affection from the force of habit, at least let the affection follow it closely. If, before making a bodily inclination to my Superioress, I have not made the interior one by a humble choice of submitting to her; let this choice at least accompany or closely follow the exterior inclination.

The daughters of the Congregation have very few Rules for the exterior, few austerities, few ceremonies, few offices; let them then willingly and lovingly accom-

* xix. 16.

modate their hearts to what they have, making the interior give birth to the exterior, and nourishing the interior by the exterior; for thus the fire produces ashes, and the ashes feed the fire.

This devotion must also be strong; 1, in resisting temptations, which are never wanting to those who wish to serve God in good earnest.

2. Strong in bearing the variety of dispositions which will be found in the Congregation, which is as great a trial for weak minds as can be met with.

3. Strong in bearing each one her own imperfections, so as not to be troubled at seeing herself subject to them. For as we must have great humility not to lose courage, but to revive our confidence in God amidst our failings; so must we also have efficient courage, to undertake the correction and perfect amendment of them.

4. Strong in combating our imperfections.

5. Strong in despising the words and judgments of the world, which never fails to censure pious institutions, especially at the beginning.

6. Strong in keeping oneself independent of private affections, friendships or inclinations; in order to live not according to them, but by the light of true piety.

7. Strong in keeping oneself independent of the sweetnesses and consolations which come to us, either from God or from creatures, that we may not be entangled in them.

8. Strong to undertake a continual war against our bad inclinations, humours, habits and passions.

Lastly, it must be generous, not to be amazed at difficulties, but on the contrary to gain fresh courage on meeting with them. For, as St. Bernard says, he is

not a very valiant man whose courage does not rise amid troubles and contradictions. It must be generous, to aim at the highest point of Christian perfection, notwithstanding all present imperfections and weaknesses, leaning with perfect confidence on the Divine mercy, after the example of her who said to her Beloved; "Draw me: we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments:" * as if she had meant; "Of myself I cannot move, but if thou wilt draw me, I will run." The Divine Lover of our souls often leaves us in the midst of our miseries, that we may know that our deliverance comes from Him, and that when we have obtained it, we may hold it dear, as a precious gift from His goodness. Therefore, as generous devotion never ceases to cry to God, "Draw me;" so it ceases not to aspire, to hope, and to promise itself boldly to run, and to say: "We will run after thee." And we must never be vexed if at first we do not run after our Saviour, provided that we always say "Draw me," and that we have a good courage to say, "We will run;" for even though we do not run, it is enough that with the help of God we would run. This congregation, like other religious orders, being an assemblage, not of perfect persons, but of persons who desire to become perfect; not of persons running, but of those who desire to run, and who therefore learn first to walk slowly, then quicker, and at last to run.

This generous devotion despises nothing, and makes us see without trouble or uneasiness, each one walking, running, or flying, differently according to the diver-

* Cant. i. 3.

sity of the inspirations, and the variety of the measures of divine grace which each receives. This is a lesson which the great Apostle St. Paul gives to the Romans, * "One believeth that he may eat all things: but he that is weak let him eat herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and he that eateth not, let him not judge him that eateth. Let every man abound in his own sense. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord: and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not; and they both give thanks to God." The rules do not enjoin many fasts; nevertheless it may be that some will obtain an obedience to do more, for particular necessities. Those who fast will not despise those who eat; nor those who eat those who fast; and so in all other things which are neither commanded nor forbidden. Let each one abound in her own sense; that is to say, let each enjoy and use her liberty, without judging or controlling the others who may not do the same as she does, nor wishing to think her way the best; since one person may eat with as much renouncement of her own will as another would fast; and one person may refrain from telling her faults from the same renouncement which induces another to tell them. Generous devotion does not wish to have companions in all that it does, but only in its aim, which is the glory of God, and the advancement of our neighbour in divine love: and provided one is going straight to that end, it does not care by what road. So long as she who fasts, fasts for God, and that she who fasts not, also fasts not for God; it is quite satisfied, as well with the one as with the other.

* xiv. 2.

It does not desire then to make others follow the same path, but pursues its own simply, humbly and quietly. Even if it should happen that a person eat, not for God but from inclination, or that she did not take the discipline, not for God, but from natural aversion; still those who go through the other practices must not judge her; but, without censuring her, they must follow their own way gently and sweetly, without despising or judging to the prejudice of the weak: remembering that if on these occasions some perhaps give way too easily to their inclinations and aversions, others do the same under other circumstances. But again those who have such inclinations and aversions must beware of saying a word, or giving any sort of sign that they are displeased because others do better, for that would be very imprudent; considering their own weakness, they ought to regard those who do better, with a holy, sweet and cordial esteem. Thus they may derive as much profit from their weakness by the humility which springs from it, as the others do from their practices. For if this point is well understood and well observed, it will keep up a wonderful tranquillity and sweetness in the Congregation. Let Martha be active, but let her not control Magdalen. Let Magdalen contemplate, but let her not despise Martha. For our Lord will take up the cause of her who shall be censured. But nevertheless, if any sisters have aversions to things that are pious, good and approved, or else inclinations to things less pious, they will, if they believe me, make use of violence, and to the utmost of their power resist their aversions and inclinations. in order to become truly mistresses of

themselves, and to serve God by an excellent mortification: thus resisting their resistance, contradicting their contradiction, declining to follow their inclinations, renouncing their aversions, and in everything, and by everything, submitting to the authority of reason, especially when they have time to make a resolution. And, in conclusion, they will try to render their hearts supple and pliable, submissive and ready to condescend in all things allowable, and to show obedience and charity in every undertaking, so as to resemble the dove, which receives all the lights the sun gives her. Blessed are the pliable hearts, for they will never break.

The daughters of the Visitation will always speak very humbly of their little Congregation, and will prefer all others to it, as to honour and esteem; and nevertheless they will always prefer it to all others, as to love; showing willingly, when the occasion presents itself, how agreeably they live in this vocation. Thus wives ought to prefer their husbands to all others, not in honour, but in affection. Thus every one prefers his own country in love, not in esteem; and every captain is more fond of the ship in which he sails, than of others, though they may be richer and better equipped. Let us freely confess that other congregations are better, richer and more excellent, but yet not more amiable and desirable for us; since our Lord has willed that this should be our country and our ship, and that our heart should be wedded to this institute; according to the saying of him who being asked what was the pleasantest abode, and the best food for the child, answered, the arms and the milk of its mother. For though

there may be more beautiful arms and better milk, there can be none more fit nor more delightful for it.

CONFERENCE II.

CONFIDENCE.

In which it is asked whether we may go to God with great confidence, even having the sentiment of our misery, and how. And of the perfect abandonment of ourselves.

You ask me, my dear daughters, if a soul impressed with the sense of its misery, may go to God with great confidence. Now I answer that not only the soul that knows its misery may have great confidence in God, but that it cannot have a true confidence if it has not the knowledge of its misery, for this knowledge and confession of our misery brings us to God.

Thus all the great saints, like Job, David, and the others, began all their prayers by the confession of their misery and unworthiness; so that it is a very good thing to acknowledge oneself poor, vile, abject, and unworthy to appear in the presence of God. That saying so celebrated among the ancients, "Know thyself," although it refers to the knowledge of the greatness and the excellence of the soul, that it may not be degraded and profaned by things unworthy of its nobility, refers also to the knowledge of our unworthiness, imperfection and misery: the more we know ourselves to be miserable, the more we shall confide in the goodness and mercy

of God. For between mercy and misery there is a certain connexion so strict that the one cannot be exercised without the other. If God had not created man, He would indeed have been all good; but He would not have been actually merciful, inasmuch as mercy can be exercised only towards the miserable. You see then, that the more we know ourselves to be miserable, the more reason we have to trust in God, since we have nothing of ourselves to trust in. Distrust of ourselves proceeds from the knowledge of our imperfections. It is very good to distrust ourselves: but to what purpose should we do so, if we did not put all our trust in God, and throw ourselves on His mercy? The faults and infidelities which we commit every day ought indeed to bring us shame and confusion, when we wish to approach our Lord; and so we read of great souls like St. Catherine of Siena, and the Mother Teresa, that when they had fallen into any fault, they felt this great confusion. It is very reasonable that having offended God, we should retire through humility for awhile and remain confused; for if we have offended only a friend, we are ashamed of accosting him. But we must not be content with this; for these virtues of humility, abjection and confusion are intermediate virtues by which we ought to rise to the union of our soul with God. It would be no great thing to have annihilated ourselves, and put off ourselves, (which we do by acts of confusion) if it were not in order to give ourselves entirely to God, as St. Paul teaches us when he says: "Put off the old man, and put on the new man." For we must not remain naked, but clothe ourselves with God. This little withdrawal is made

only to spring forward the better towards God by an act of love and confidence. For we must not confound ourselves with sadness and disquietude; it is self-love that gives rise to those confusions; because we are grieved at being imperfect not so much from love of God as from love of ourselves. And if we do not feel this confidence, we must not omit to make acts of it, and to say to our Lord: Although, O Lord, I have no feeling of confidence in Thee, yet I know that Thou art my God, that I am all Thine, and have no hope but in Thy goodness; therefore I abandon myself entirely into Thy hands. It is always in our power to make these acts; and though there may be difficulty, yet there is no impossibility; and it is on these occasions, and amidst these difficulties that we are to show our fidelity to our Lord; for though we may make these acts without any pleasure or satisfaction, we must not be disturbed at it, since our Lord likes them better so. And do not say that you speak the words only with the mouth; for if the heart were not willing, the mouth would not speak a word. Having done this, remain in peace; and without paying any attention to your trouble, speak to our Lord of other things. This then is the conclusion of this first point, that it is very good to feel confusion, when we have the knowledge and sentiment of our misery and imperfection; but that we must not stop there, nor on that account fall into discouragement, but raise our hearts to God with a holy confidence, of which the foundation must be in Him and not in ourselves; inasmuch as we change, and He never changes, but remains always as good and merciful when we are

weak and imperfect, as when we are strong and perfect. I am accustomed to say that our misery is the throne of the mercy of God: the greater then is our misery, the greater should be our confidence.

Let us now pass to the other question, which is concerning the abandonment of ourselves, and what should be the practice of the soul who has abandoned herself. We must know then that to abandon our souls, and to give up ourselves, is nothing else than to leave and get rid of our own will, in order to give it to God. For it would scarcely be of any use, as I have already said, to renounce and relinquish ourselves, if we did not unite ourselves perfectly to the Divine goodness. It is then only for this purpose that we must make this renouncement, which would otherwise be useless, and would resemble that of the ancient philosophers, who made admirable renouncements of everything and of themselves for a vain end, and to give themselves up to philosophy. Thus Epictetus, a very renowned philosopher, being born a slave, was offered his freedom on account of his great wisdom; but he, by the greatest of all renouncements, refused his liberty, and thus voluntarily remained in slavery, and in such poverty, that after his death nothing was found belonging to him but a lamp, which was sold very dear, because it had belonged to so great a man. But as for us, we will not renounce ourselves except to leave ourselves at the mercy of the will of God. There are many people who say to our Lord: I give myself entirely to Thee, without any reserve; but there are very few who embrace the practice of this abandonment, which is nothing else than a perfect indifference

in receiving all sorts of events, as they happen in the order of the Providence of God, affliction as well as consolation, illness as well as health, poverty as well as riches, contempt as well as honour, disgrace as well as glory. This I mean to be in the superior part of our soul, for there is no doubt that the inferior and natural inclination will always tend rather to the side of honour than of contempt, of riches than of poverty, although every one must know that contempt, abjection, and poverty are more agreeable to God, than honour and abundance of riches. Now, to make this renouncement, we must obey the will of God signified to us, and also that of His good pleasure; the one by means of resignation, the other by means of indifference. The will of God signified to us comprehends His commands, His counsels, His inspirations, our Rules and the ordinances of our superiors. The will of His good pleasure relates to the events which we cannot foresee; as, for example, I do not know whether I shall die to-morrow, I see that it is the good pleasure of God, and therefore I abandon myself to His good pleasure, and die willingly. In like manner, I do not know whether in the coming year all the fruits of the earth will be destroyed by tempests; if it happen that they are, or that there is a plague, or any other such event, it is quite evident that it is the good pleasure of God, and therefore I conform myself to it. It will happen that you have no consolation in your exercises: it is certain that it is the good pleasure of God, and therefore we must remain with extreme indifference between desolation and consolation. We must do the same in all things that come

before us; in the clothes that are given to us, in the food that is offered to us. It is also to be remarked that there are cases in which we must unite the will of God signified, with that of His good pleasure; as, if I fall ill of a bad fever, I see in this event that the good pleasure of God is that I should remain indifferent to health or sickness: but the will of God signified is, that I, who am not under obedience, should call in the physician and apply all the remedies I can; I do not say the most refined, but the common and ordinary ones; and that religious, who are under a superior, should receive the remedies and treatment which are offered to them, with simplicity and submission: for God has signified it to us, inasmuch as He gives virtue to remedies; Holy Scripture teaches it in several places, and the Church commands it. That being done, whether the remedy overcome the illness, or the illness the remedy, we must be in perfect indifference; in such a way that if illness and health were there before us, and our Lord said to us; "If thou choosest health, I shall not take away from thee one grain of my grace; if thou choosest illness I will not augment it either; but in the choice of illness there is a little more of my good pleasure:" Then the soul that has entirely abandoned itself into the hands of our Lord, would no doubt choose illness, for the sole reason that in so doing there is a little more of the good pleasure of God. Yes, even if it were to be all her life confined to bed, without doing anything but suffer, she would not for all the world desire any other state but that. Thus, the saints who are in Heaven are so united to the will of God, that if there were a little more of

His good pleasure in hell, they would leave Paradise to go there. This state of renouncement of ourselves comprises also abandonment to the good pleasure of God, in all temptations, aridities, drynesses, aversions and repugnances which occur in the spiritual life; for in all these things we see the good pleasure of God, when they do not happen through our own fault, and when there is no sin. In short, abandonment is the virtue of virtues; it is the cream of charity, the odour of humility, the merit, it seems, of patience, and the fruit of perseverance. Great is this virtue, and alone worthy of being practised by God's most dear children. "Father," said our sweet Saviour on the cross, "into thy hands I commend my spirit."* It is true, He meant, that all is consummated, and that I have accomplished all that Thou hast commanded me: but yet, if it is Thy will that I should remain still on this cross, to suffer more, I am content; I commend my spirit into Thy hands, Thou canst do with it as Thou pleasest. We must do the same, my very dear daughters, on all occasions, whether we suffer, or whether we enjoy any satisfaction; letting ourselves thus be conducted by the divine will, according to His good pleasure, without ever allowing ourselves to be pre-occupied by our own will. Our Lord loves with an extremely tender love, those who are so happy as to abandon themselves thus entirely to His paternal care, letting Divine Providence govern them, without amusing themselves with considering whether the effects of this Providence will be useful, profitable, or injurious to them; being well assured that nothing

* St. Luke xxiii. 46.

can be sent them from that paternal and most amiable Heart, and that He will permit nothing to happen to them, but what will prove good and useful to them, provided that they have put all their confidence in Him, and that with all their heart they say: I commend my spirit, my soul, my body, and all that I have, into Thy blessed hands, to do with them as it may please Thee. For we are never reduced to such extremity, that we cannot still exhale before the Divine Majesty the perfumes of a holy submission to His most holy will, and of a continual promise that we will not offend Him. Sometimes our Lord wills that souls chosen for the service of His divine Majesty should cherish a firm and invariable resolution to persevere in following Him amid the disgusts, drynesses, repugnances and rigours of the spiritual life, without consolations, favours, tenderness, or delights; and that they should think themselves worthy of nothing else, following thus our Divine Saviour with the highest point of the spirit, without other support than that of His divine will which wills it so. And thus it is that I desire we should walk, my dear daughters

Now you ask me what ought to be the interior occupation of this soul, that has entirely abandoned herself into the hands of God. She does nothing but remain near our Lord, without any care, not even for her body or her soul; for since she is embarked under the Providence of God, why need she think what will become of her? our Lord, to whom she has resigned herself, will think enough for her. I do not, however, mean to say that we must not think of the things committed to us in our respective offices; for a superior

must not, under pretext of being abandoned to God and reposing on His care, neglect to read and to learn the directions necessary for the exercise of his office.

It is very true that we must have great confidence in order thus to abandon ourselves, without reserve, to Divine Providence; but also, when we abandon everything, our Lord takes care of everything and arranges everything. For if we reserve something, about which we do not trust in Him, He leaves it to us; as if He said: "You think you are wise enough to do that thing without Me, I leave you to manage it; you will see how you succeed." Those who are dedicated to God in religion, ought to abandon everything, without any reserve. Saint Mary Magdalen, who had abandoned herself entirely to the will of our Lord, remained at His feet, and listened to Him while He spoke; and when He ceased to speak, she ceased also to listen, but she did not stir from His side.

Thus this soul which has abandoned itself, has nothing else to do but to remain in the arms of our Lord, like a child on the breast of its mother; which, when she puts it down to walk, walks till she takes it up again, and when she chooses to carry it, lets her do so: it does not know nor think where it is going, but lets itself be carried or led where its mother pleases. In the same way, this soul that loves the will of God's good pleasure in all that happens to her, lets herself be carried, and yet walks, doing with great care all that is the signified will of God. You ask now if it is really possible that our will can be so dead in our Lord, that we no longer know what we wish or do not wish. Now I say in the first place that, however abandoned we

may be, our liberty and the freedom of our will always remain to us; so that we still feel some desire and some will; but they are not absolute wills nor formed desires. For so soon as a soul that has given herself up to the good pleasure of God, perceives in herself any will, she immediately makes it die in the will of God.

You wish also to know whether a soul that is still very imperfect may usefully remain before God, with a simple attention to His holy presence in prayer. And I answer, that if God places you in it, you may well remain: for it often happens that our Lord gives this quietude and tranquillity to souls that are not well purified; but while they still require purifying they ought, out of prayer, to make the remarks and considerations necessary for their amendment. For, even though God may keep them always very recollected, there yet remains to them sufficient liberty to discourse with the understanding on various indifferent matters. Why, then, should they not consider and make resolutions for their amendment and for the practice of virtue? There are very perfect persons, to whom our Lord never gave such sweetness, nor such quietude, who do everything with the superior part of their soul, and put to death their will in the will of God by main force and with the point of their reason: this death is the death of the cross, and is much more excellent and generous than the other, which ought rather to be called sleep than death. For this soul which is embarked in the vessel of the Providence of God, lets herself be carried and sails gently; as a person who, sleeping in a ship on a tranquil sea, does not fail to advance. This sweet

manner of death is given by way of grace, and the other is given by way of merit.

You wish also to know what foundation our confidence should have. It must be founded on the infinite goodness of God, and on the merits of the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, with this condition on our part, that we should have and acknowledge in ourselves an entire and firm resolution to belong wholly to God, and to abandon ourselves entirely and without any reserve to His Providence. I wish you, however, to remark that I do not say that we must feel this resolution to be thus wholly belonging to God; but only that we must have it and know that it is in us; because we must not amuse ourselves with what we feel or do not feel; inasmuch as most of our feelings and satisfactions are only the amusements of our self-love. Moreover, we must not suppose that in all these matters, of abandonment and indifference, we may never have desires contrary to the will of God, and that our nature will not be repugnant to the events ordered by His good pleasure, for that may often happen. They are virtues residing in the superior part of the soul: the inferior part usually has nothing to do with them, and we must take no account of it; but in spite of its opposition and without regarding its wishes, we must embrace and unite ourselves to this Divine will. Few persons attain to this degree of perfect abandonment of themselves: nevertheless we must all aspire to it, each of us according to our power and our little capacity.

CONFERENCE III.

FIRMNESS.

On the flight of Our Lord into Egypt, treating of the firmness we should have amidst the accidents of the world.

We are celebrating the Octave of the Feast of the Holy Innocents, on which day Holy Church bids us read the Gospel which relates how the Angel of the Lord said to the glorious St. Joseph in a dream, that is to say in sleep, that he was to take the Child and the Mother, and fly into Egypt: inasmuch as Herod, jealous of his royalty, was seeking our Lord to put Him to death, for fear He should take it from him; and being filled with anger because the three kings had not returned to him to Jerusalem, he commanded all the little children under the age of two years to be put to death, thinking that our Lord would be amongst them, and that he would by this means secure to himself the possession of his kingdom. This Gospel is full of a quantity of beautiful thoughts. I will content myself with a few of them, which will serve as a conference equally useful and agreeable. I begin with the first remark made by the great St. John Chrysostom, which is on the inconstancy, variety, and instability of the accidents of this mortal life. O how useful is this consideration! The want of it is what leads us to discouragement and frivolity of mind, uneasiness and variability of humour, inconstancy and unsteadiness in our resolutions; for we want to meet with no difficulty,

no contradiction, and no trouble on our way: we would always have consolations without dryness or aridity, good without any mixture of evil, health without sickness, repose without labour, peace without disturbance. Oh! who does not see our folly? for we want that which cannot be. Purity is found only in Heaven and in Hell; in Heaven, good, repose and consolation are in their purity, without any mixture of evil, trouble or affliction. On the contrary, in Hell, evil, despair, trouble, and uneasiness are in their purity, without any mixture of good, of hope, of tranquillity or of peace. But in this perishable life, good is never found without being followed by evil, riches without inquietude, repose without labour, consolation without affliction, health without sickness. In short all is here mixed and mingled, good with evil: it is a continual variety of divers accidents. Thus God has willed to diversify the seasons, and that summer should be followed by autumn, and winter by spring, to show us that nothing is permanent in this life; that temporal things are perpetually mutable, inconstant, and subject to change. And the want of the knowledge of this truth is, as I have said, what makes us mutable and changing in our humours, because we do not make use of the reason that God has given us, which renders us immutable, firm, and solid, and therefore like unto God. When God said: "Let us make man to our image,"* He gave him at the same time the use of reason, to discuss, consider, and discern good from evil, and the things which deserve to be chosen or rejected. Reason it is that renders us supe-

* Genesis i. 26.

riors and masters of all animals. When God had created our first parents, He gave them entire dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the animals of the earth; and consequently He gave them the knowledge of each species, and the means of ruling them, and becoming their lords and masters. God has not only conferred on man this favour, of making him lord of the animals, by means of the gift of reason by which He has made him like Himself; but He has also given him full power over all sorts of accidents and events. It is said that the wise man, that is, the man who acts by reason, will render himself absolute master of the stars. What does that mean, but that by the use of reason, he will remain firm and constant amidst the diversity of the accidents and events of this mortal life? Let the weather be fine or rainy, let the air be calm or the wind high, the wise man is not troubled, knowing well that nothing is stable and permanent in this life, and that the place of repose is not here. In affliction he does not despair, but he waits for consolation: in sickness he does not torment himself, but he waits for health; or if he perceives himself to be so ill that death must ensue, he blesses God, hoping for the repose of the immortal life that follows the present one. If he meets with poverty, he does not grieve; for he well knows that riches cannot be in this life without poverty: if he is despised, he knows well that here below honour has no permanence, but is usually followed by dishonour or contempt: in short, in all sorts of events, whether in prosperity or adversity, he remains firm, stable and constant in his resolutions, of tending and aspiring to the possession of eternal joys.

But we must not consider this variety, change, mutation and inconstancy, only in the transitory and material things of this mortal life. By no means: we must also consider that they belong to the success of our spiritual life, in which firmness and constancy are as much more necessary, as the spiritual life is elevated above the mortal and corporal life. It is a very great abuse to be unwilling to bear or to feel mutations and changes in our humours, while we do not govern ourselves by reason, nor let ourselves be governed. It is commonly said: "Look at that child, he is very young, but yet he already has the use of reason." Thus many people have the use of reason, who, like children, do not however conduct themselves by the guidance of reason. God has given reason to man to conduct him; yet there are few who let it have the upper hand in them: on the contrary, they let themselves be governed by their passions, which ought to be subject and obedient to reason in the order that God requires of us. I will explain myself more familiarly. Most persons in the world let themselves be governed and led by their passions and not by reason; thus they are generally fanciful, variable, and changeable in their humours. If they have a fancy to go to bed early or late, they do so; if they wish to go into the country, they rise very early in the morning; but if they are inclined to sleep, they do so equally: when they want to dine or breakfast early or very late, they do so too; and not only are they whimsical and inconstant in these things, but even in their conversation. They will have others give way to their humours and they will not accommodate themselves to those of others: they let themselves be carried away

by their inclinations and particular affections and passions, without its being esteemed wrong among worldly people; and provided they do not much inconvenience their neighbour, they are not thought fanciful or inconstant. And why? Only because it is a common evil among the worldly. But in religion we cannot let ourselves be thus carried away by our passions; for in exterior things the rules are to keep us regular in praying, eating, and sleeping, and so on in the other exercises, always at the same hour, when obedience or the bell call us; and then we must always have the same society, for we cannot separate from each other. In what then can we practice frivolity and inconstancy? In the diversity of humours, wishes, and desires. Now I am joyous, because everything happens according to my wishes; at another time I am sad, because of a little contradiction which I did not expect. But did you not know that this is not the place where pleasure is to be found pure, without mixture of displeasure; that this life is full of similar accidents? To-day as you have consolation in prayer, you are encouraged and firmly resolved to serve God; but to-morrow when you are in dryness, you will have no heart for the service of God. "O God! I am so languid and cast down," you say. Now, tell me, if you governed yourself by reason, would you not see that if it was good to serve God yesterday, it is still very good to serve Him to-day, and that it will be very good to serve Him to-morrow? For He is always the same God, equally worthy of being loved, whether you are in dryness or whether you are in consolation. Now we wish for one thing, and to-morrow we shall wish for

something else: what I see such or such a person do, now pleases me, and soon will displease me; so that it might even inspire me with aversion. Now I like a person and am really pleased in her society, to-morrow I shall hardly be able to bear it: what does that mean? Is she not as worthy of being loved to-day, as she was yesterday? If we look at what reason dictates to us, we shall see that we ought to love this person, because she is a creature who bears the image of the Divine Majesty; thus we shall have as much sweetness in her conversation, as we had formerly. But this arises simply from our letting ourselves be conducted by our inclinations, by our passions and affections, thus perverting the order that God had given us, that all should be subject to reason. For if reason does not reign over all our powers, our faculties, our passions, inclinations, affections, and in short over all that belongs to us, what will result, but a continual vicissitude, inconstancy, variety, change, and caprice, which will make us sometimes fervent, and soon after remiss, negligent, and idle, sometimes joyous and sometimes melancholy? We shall be tranquil for an hour, and then unquiet for two days; in short, our life will pass in idleness and loss of time. Now, by this first remark we are incited and attracted to consider the inconstancy and variety of success, as well in spiritual as in temporal things; in order that we may not lose courage under occurrences which might frighten us if they were new and unforeseen, not giving way to unevenness of temper amid the inequalities of the things which happen to us; but, that submitting to the guidance of the reason which God has placed in us, and to His Providence, we may remain

firm, constant and invariable in the resolution we have made to serve God constantly, courageously, boldly, and ardently, without any interruption whatever. If I were speaking to persons who did not understand me, I should try to inculcate, as best I could, what I have said; but you know that I have always endeavoured to impress well upon your memory this most holy evenness of spirit, as being the virtue the most necessary and appropriate to religion. All the ancient fathers of religious orders have aimed particularly at making this equality and stability of temper and spirit reign in their monasteries. For this they established statutes, constitutions, and rules, that the religious might make use of them, as of a bridge, to pass from the continual equality of the exercises which are marked out, and to which they have subjected themselves, to that equality of spirit so amiable and desirable amid the inconstancy and inequality of the accidents that are met with on the path, as well of our spiritual, as of our mortal life. The great St. Chrysostom says: "O man, who vexest thyself because all things do not happen as thou wishest, art thou not ashamed to see that what thou wishest was not found even in the family of our Lord?" Consider, I pray thee, the vicissitudes, the changes, and diversity of events we meet with there. Our Lady received the news that she should conceive of the Holy Ghost a Son, who would be our Lord and Saviour; what joy, what jubilation for her in that sacred hour of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word! Shortly afterwards, St. Joseph perceives that she is with child, and knowing well that it was not by him that she was so, O God, what affliction! into what distress was he not plunged!

And our Lady, what extremity of grief and affliction did she not feel in her soul, on seeing her dear husband on the point of quitting her, her modesty not permitting her to reveal to St. Joseph the honour and grace that God had bestowed upon her! A little after this storm had passed, the angel having discovered to St. Joseph the secret of this mystery, what consolation did they not receive! When our Lady brings forth her Son, the angels announce His birth, the shepherds and the kings come to adore Him. I leave you to imagine what joy and consolation of spirit they felt in all this. But, wait a little, this is not all. A short time after, the angel of the Lord came to say to St. Joseph, in a dream, "Take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt;" for Herod wishes to put the Child to death. Oh! this must have been, no doubt, a subject of very great grief to our Lady and St. Joseph. Oh, how the angel treats St. Joseph like a true religious! "Take the Child," he says, "and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee."* What is this? Might not poor St. Joseph have said, "You tell me that I must go; will it not be time enough to set out to-morrow morning? Where would you have me go by night? My preparations are not made. How would you have me carry the child? Will my arms be strong enough to carry Him continually on so long a journey? What! do you mean that the Mother should carry Him in her turn? Alas! do not you see that she is a young girl, who is still so delicate? I have neither horse nor money for the journey; and do not

* St. Matth. ii. 13.

you know that the Egyptians are the enemies of the Israelites? Who will receive us?" And similar things, which we certainly should have alleged to the angel, if we had been in the place of St. Joseph, who said not a word to excuse himself from obedience, but set out the same hour, and did all that the angel had commanded him.

There are many beautiful remarks to be made upon this command. First, we are taught that there must be no delay nor putting off in what regards obedience. It is the act of the idle to put off, and to say, as St. Augustine says of himself, "Presently, yet a little while, and then I will be converted." The Holy Spirit will have no delay, He desires great promptitude in following His inspirations; our loss proceeds from our idleness, which makes us say, I will begin presently. Why not at this moment when He inspires and urges us? Because we are so tender to ourselves, that we fear everything that seems to take us out of our repose, which is nothing else than our idleness and indolence, from which we will not be disturbed by any objects which attract us to go out of ourselves; and we say, like the slothful man, complaining that they would make him go out of his house: "How can I go out," said he, "when there is a lion in the road, and the bears are in the paths, and will no doubt devour me?" Oh, we are very wrong in permitting God to knock again and again at the door of our heart, before we will open it and permit Him to abide there! for it is to be feared that we shall irritate Him and compel Him to abandon us.

Moreover, we must consider the great peace and

equality of mind of the most holy Virgin and St. Joseph, and their constancy amid the so great inequality of the divers accidents which happened to them, as we have said. Now see whether we have reason to be troubled and astonished if we meet with similar accidents in the house of God, which is religion; since they occurred even in the family of our Lord, where He resided, who is firmness and stability itself. It must be said, and repeated many times, in order to engrave it better on our minds, that the inequality of accidents ought never to lead our minds and our spirits into inequality of humour; for inequality of humour arises from no other source than from our unmortified passions, inclinations, or affections, and they ought to have no power over us, when they incite us to do, to give up, or to desire any thing, however trifling, which is contrary to what reason commands us to do, or to give up in order to please God.

I pass to the second consideration, which I make on this word of the angel of the Lord, who said to St. Joseph, "Take the Child," and what follows; but I stop upon this word, "the angel of the Lord." On which I desire that we should remark the esteem we should feel for the care, help, assistance, and direction of those whom God places around us, to aid us to walk securely in the way of perfection. We must know first, that when it is said, "the angel of the Lord," it must not be understood as if it were like what is said of ourselves, the angel of such a one; for that means our guardian angel to whom God has given the care of us; but our Lord, who is the King and Guide of the angels themselves, has no need, and in the course of His mortal

life had no need of a guardian angel. When, then, it is said, "the angel of the Lord," it must be understood to mean, the angel destined to conduct the house and family of our Lord, and more especially dedicated to His service, and that of the most holy Virgin. To explain this familiarly: you have changed offices and aids in the last few days. What is the meaning of these aids that are given you? Why are they given you? St. Gregory says that we must do in this miserable world like those who walk upon ice, to keep ourselves firm and steady in the work we have undertaken, of saving our souls, or of becoming perfect; for, he says, they take each other by the hand, or under the arm; so that if one among them slips, he may be kept up by the other, and the other supported by him when he is shaken and falling in his turn. We are in this life as upon ice, finding on all sides occasions likely to make us fall, sometimes into sadness, then into mourning, a little after into caprice of mind, which will make us discontented with everything that is done; and then we shall be disgusted with our vocation, when melancholy suggests to us that we shall never do anything good, and I know not what. Such ideas and accidents as these are met with in our little spiritual world, for man is an abridgment of the world, or rather a little world, where we meet with everything that is seen in the great universal world. The passions represent the beasts and animals, which have no reason. The senses, the inclinations, the affections, the powers and faculties of our soul, all these have their peculiar signification; but I will not delay upon that, I will follow the discourse I have begun. The aids, then, who are given us,

are to aid us to keep firm on our way, and prevent us from falling, or, if we fall, to help us to rise again. O God! with what frankness, cordiality, sincerity, simplicity, and faithful confidence ought we not to treat with these aids, who are given us by God for our spiritual advancement? Not otherwise, certainly, than as with our good angels; we should look upon them exactly in the same light. For our good angels are called our guardian angels because they are charged to assist us by their inspirations, to defend us in our perils, to reprove us for our faults, to excite us in the pursuit of virtue; they are charged to carry our prayers before the throne of the majesty, goodness, and mercy of our Lord, and to bring back to us the answers to our petitions; and the favours which God wills to bestow on us, He bestows through the ministry or intercession of our good angels. Our aids are our visible good angels, as our holy guardian angels are our invisible ones; our aids do visibly what our good angels do interiorly, for they warn us of our faults, they encourage us in our weakness and cowardice, they excite us to the pursuit of our design of attaining to perfection; by their good counsels they prevent us from falling, and help us to rise when we are near some precipice of defeat or imperfection. If we are overwhelmed with weariness or disgust, they help us to bear our trouble patiently, and pray God to give us strength to bear it as we ought, and not to yield to the temptation. See then what value we should set on their assistance, and on the care they take of us.

In the next place, I consider why our Lord, who is Eternal Wisdom, does not take care of His family; I mean, by warning St. Joseph, or else His most sweet

Mother, of all that was to happen to them. Could He not easily have whispered in the ear of His good father St. Joseph: "Let us go into Egypt, we shall be there for so long;" since it is quite certain that He had the use of reason from the instant of His conception in the womb of the most holy Virgin. But He would not do this miracle of speaking before the time was come. Could He not easily have inspired it into the heart of His most holy Mother, or of His well-beloved reputed father St. Joseph, the husband of the most sacred Virgin? Why, then, did He not do all this, rather than leave the charge of it to the Angel who was far inferior to our Lady? This is not without mystery. Our Lord would not take anything from the charge of St. Gabriel, who, having been commissioned by the Eternal Father to announce the mystery of the Incarnation to the glorious Virgin, was thenceforth as it were chief steward of the house and family of our Lord, to take care of it in the various events and accidents it might meet with, and to hinder anything from happening which might shorten the mortal life of our little new-born Child. This is why he warned St. Joseph to carry Him away quickly into Egypt, to avoid the tyranny of Herod, who intended to kill Him. Our Lord would not govern Himself, but let Himself be carried where and by whom others chose. It seems that He did not esteem Himself wise enough to govern Himself, nor His family: but He let Himself be governed by the angel as it pleased him, though he had not science or wisdom to be compared with that of His Divine Majesty. And now we, shall we be bold enough to say that we can govern ourselves well, as

having no longer need of direction, nor of the aid of those whom God has given us to guide us, esteeming them not sufficiently capable for us? Tell me, was the angel greater than our Lord, or our Lady? had he a greater mind, or more judgment? By no means. Was he better qualified and endowed with any special or particular grace? That cannot be, seeing that our Lord is God and Man at the same time, and that our Lady being His Mother, has in consequence more grace and perfection than all the angels together. Nevertheless the angel commands and is obeyed. But, moreover, observe the order that is kept in this holy family: there is no doubt that it was the same as in those of the sparrow-hawks, where the females are mistresses and of more account than the males. Who can doubt that our Lady was greater than St. Joseph, and that she had more discretion, and qualities proper for governing, than her spouse? Yet the angel does not address himself to her for what is required to be done, whether it be going or coming, or anything else. Does it not seem to you that the angel commits a great indiscretion in addressing himself rather to St. Joseph than to our Lady, who is the head of the house, carrying with her the Treasure of the Eternal Father? Had she not reason to be offended at this proceeding, and way of acting? Doubtless she might have said to her husband: "Why should I go into Egypt, since my Son has not revealed to me that I ought to do so, nor has the angel spoken to me of it?" Now our Lady says nothing of this sort. She is not offended because the angel addresses himself to St. Joseph, but she obeys quite simply, because she knows that God has so ordered

it. She does not enquire why; but it suffices her that God wills it so, and that He takes pleasure in submitting Himself, without consideration. "But I am greater than the angel," she might have said, "and than St. Joseph." Nothing of the kind. Do not you see that God takes pleasure in treating thus with men, to teach them holy and loving submission? St. Peter was an old man, rough and uncouth; and St. John, on the contrary, was young, gentle, and agreeable; and yet God wills that St. Peter should lead the others, and be the universal superior, and that St. John should be one of those who are led, and who obey him. How foolish is the human spirit, which will not render itself capable of adoring the secret mysteries of God and His most holy will, unless it has some knowledge of the reasons for this or that! I have more talent, we say of ourselves, more experience, and such like fine reasons, which are only fit to produce uneasiness, capricious humours, and murmurs. "For what reason has this charge been given? Why was that said? For what purpose is such a thing done to one person rather than to another?" What a pity! If once we allow ourselves to pick to pieces whatever we see done, what do we not do to destroy the tranquillity of our hearts? We need have no other reasons, but that God wills it so; and that ought to be sufficient for us. "But who will give me assurance that it is the will of God?" We would have God reveal everything to us by secret inspirations. Do we expect that He will send us angels to announce to us what is His will? He did not do so even to our Lady (at least in this instance), but chose to let her know by the intervention of St. Joseph, to

whom she was subject as to her superior. We wish sometimes to be taught and instructed by God Himself, by means of ecstasies or raptures and visions, and, what shall I say, such like follies which we invent in our own minds; rather than submit to the most amiable and common way of a holy submission to the guidance of those whom God has given us, and to the observance of the direction as well of the rules as of superiors. Let it then suffice us to know that God wills that we should obey, without amusing ourselves with considering the capacity of those whom we are to obey: thus we shall subject our minds to walk simply in the most happy way of a holy and tranquil humility, which will render us infinitely agreeable to God.

We must now pass to the third consideration, which is a remark that I have made upon the command given by the angel to St. Joseph to take the Child and the Mother, and to go into Egypt and remain there till he told him to return. Truly the angel spoke very briefly, and treated St. Joseph like a good religious: "Go and do not return till I tell thee." By this mode of proceeding between the angel and St. Joseph, we are taught in the third place how we ought to embark on the sea of Divine Providence, without food, without oars, without sails, and in short without any sort of provisions; and thus leave all the care of ourselves and of the success of our affairs to our Lord, without reflection, or replies, or any fear whatever of what may happen to us. For the angel says merely: "Take the Child and the Mother and fly into Egypt;" without telling him either by what road, or what provisions they would have for their journey, or to what part of

Egypt, still less who would receive them or how they would be fed while they were there. Had not poor St. Joseph reason to make some reply? "You tell me to set out; must it be so quickly?" This very hour, to show us the promptitude which the Holy Spirit requires of us when He says to us: Arise, go out of thyself and conquer such an imperfection. Oh! what an enemy is the Holy Ghost to delay and procrastination! Consider, I beg of you, that great pattern and model of perfect religious St. Abraham; see how God treats him, "Go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee."* What sayest Thou, O Lord, that I am to go out of the town? But tell me then whether I should go to the East or to the West? He makes no reply: he sets out quickly and goes where the Spirit of God leads him, to a mountain which has since been called "The Vision of God:" inasmuch as he received great and signal graces on that mountain, to show how agreeable to God is promptitude in obedience. Might not St. Joseph have said to the angel: "You tell me to take the Child and the Mother; tell me then, if you please, how I am to feed them on the way? for you well know, my Lord, that we have no money." He said nothing like this; he fully trusted that God would provide. And so He did, though sparingly, giving them enough to live simply upon, either by the trade of St. Joseph, or even by the alms that were given them. Certainly, all the ancient religious were admirable for the confidence they

* Genesis xii. 1.

had that God would always provide them with what they required for the support of life, leaving all care of themselves to Divine Providence; but I consider that it is required of us to repose in Divine Providence not only for what regards temporal things, but much more for what belongs to our spiritual life and to our perfection. It is certainly only the too great care we take of ourselves which makes us lose the tranquillity of our mind, and which leads us into capricious and variable humours: for the moment that any contradictions occur, and that we perceive even a little sign of our want of mortification, or that we commit some fault, however small, we fancy all is lost. Is it any great wonder to see ourselves stumble sometimes? "But I am so miserable, so full of imperfections." Do you know it well? Thank God that He has given you this knowledge, and do not lament so much: you are very happy in knowing that you are nothing but misery itself. After having thanked God for the knowledge He has given you, retrench this useless tenderness, which makes you complain of your infirmity. We indulge in tenderness towards our bodies, which is very contrary to perfection, but far more so is that which we have towards our souls. "O God! I am not faithful to our Lord, and therefore I have no consolation in prayer." A great pity, to be sure! "But I am so often in dryness, it makes me think I am not right with God, who is so full of consolations." That is well said indeed; as if God always gave consolations to His friends. Was there ever a pure creature, so worthy of being beloved by God, and who was more beloved by Him, than our Lady, and also St. Joseph? See if they were always in

consolation. Is it possible to imagine a more extreme affliction than that which St. Joseph felt, when he perceived that the glorious Virgin was with child, well knowing that it was not by him? His affliction and his distress were so much the greater, as the passion of love is more vehement than any other passion of the soul; and besides, in love, jealousy is the extremity of pain, as the spouse declares in the Canticle of Canticles. "Love," she says, "is strong as death;" for love has the same effect on the soul, as death has on the body. But "jealousy is hard as hell."* I leave you then to suppose what was the grief of poor St. Joseph, and of our Lady also, when she saw what opinion he might have of her, whom she loved so dearly, and by whom she knew she was so dearly loved. Jealousy made him languish: not knowing what to do, he resolved, rather than blame her whom he had always so much honoured and loved, to quit her, and to go away without saying a word. But you will say, "I feel strongly the pain caused me by this temptation or imperfection." I believe it: but is it to be compared to that of which we have just spoken? It cannot be, and if that is so, consider, I beg of you, whether we have reason to complain and lament; since St. Joseph does not complain, nor show any sign of it exteriorly; he is not at all more bitter in his conversation; he does not show it to our Lady, he does not treat her ill; but he simply bears his grief, and thinks only of leaving her. God knows what he could have done in this matter. "My aversion to this person," some one will

* Cant. viii. 6.

say, "is so great, that I can hardly speak to her without great difficulty: this action displeases me so much." It is all the same. Yet we must not take a fancy against her, as if it were her fault; we must behave like our Lady and St. Joseph. We must be tranquil under our trouble, and leave to our Lord the care of taking it away from us when it shall please Him. It was quite in our Lady's power to appease this storm; yet she would not do it, but left the issue of this affair entirely to Divine Providence. In the lute there are two discordant strings, the treble and the bass, and equally necessary to be tuned in order to sound well: nothing is more discordant than the treble with the bass; yet without these two strings being in tune together, the harmony of the lute cannot be agreeable. In the same way there are in our spiritual lute two things equally discordant, and necessary to be tuned together; the taking great care to perfect ourselves, and the taking no care of our perfection, but leaving it entirely to God: I mean that we must take the care that God wishes us to take to perfect ourselves, and nevertheless leave to Him the care of our perfection. God wills that our care should be tranquil and peaceable, which may make us do what is judged right by those who guide us, and go always faithfully forward on the road marked out for us by the rules and directories which are given us; and as for the rest, that we should repose on His paternal care, endeavouring, as far as possible, to keep our soul in peace: for the abode of God was made in peace, and in the heart that is peaceable and at rest. You know that when the lake is very calm, and the winds do not agitate its waters,

the sky with the stars on a clear night is so well represented in it, that looking down one sees the beauty of the heavens as well as by looking up. So, when our soul is very tranquil, and the winds of superfluous cares, of inequality of mind and inconstancy do not trouble and disturb it, it is well capable of bearing in itself the image of our Lord. But when it is troubled, disturbed, and agitated by divers storms of passions, and when we let ourselves be governed by them, and not by reason, which makes us like unto God, then we are by no means capable of representing the beautiful and most lovely image of our Lord crucified, nor the diversity of His excellent virtues; nor can our soul serve Him for a nuptial bed. We must leave then the care of ourselves to the mercy of Divine Providence, and do nevertheless simply and earnestly what is in our power, to amend and perfect ourselves; taking always the utmost care not to let our minds be troubled or disturbed. I remark, lastly, that the Angel tells St. Joseph to remain in Egypt till he warns him to return; and that the good saint does not say to him: "And when will the time be, my Lord, that you will warn me?" to teach us that when we are told to undertake some exercise, we must not say, "Will it be for long?" but embrace it simply, imitating the perfect obedience of Abraham. When God commanded him to sacrifice his son, he made no reply, nor complaint, nor delay in executing the command of God; therefore God favoured him greatly, showing him a ram, which he sacrificed on the mountain instead of his son, God being satisfied with his good will.

I conclude with the simplicity which St. Joseph

practised in going, at the command of the angel, into Egypt, when he was sure to find as many enemies as there were inhabitants in that country. Might he not well have said, "You make me carry away the child; you make us fly from one enemy, and you will put us into the hands of thousands and thousands of others, whom we shall find in Egypt, inasmuch as we are children of Israel?" He makes no reflection on the command, and that is why he went full of peace and confidence in God. In like manner, my daughters, when any office is given us, let us not say, "My God, I am so hasty, if they give me such a charge, I shall give a thousand signs of impatience. I am already so distracted, if they give me such an office, I shall be still more so; but if they left me in my cell, I should be so modest, so tranquil, so recollected." Go simply into Egypt, into the midst of the great number of enemies you will find there; for God, who sends you there, will preserve you, and you will not die there; and, on the contrary, if you remain in Israel, where the enemy is your own will, it will doubtless put you to death. It would not be well to take charges and offices of our own choice, for fear we should not do our duty in them; but when it is under obedience, let us never make any excuse, for God is with us, and will make us advance more in perfection than if we had nothing to do. And do not you know what I have already told you before, and what it is not amiss to repeat, that virtue does not require that we should be freed from the occasion of falling into the imperfection which is contrary to it? It is not enough, says Cassian, to be deprived of the conversation of men, to make us patient and gentle in ourselves, for it has

DIVINITY SCHOOL OF THE PACIFIC LIBRARY

happened to me, being quite alone in my cell, to be so passionate when my flint did not strike fire, as to throw it away in anger.

Now we must really finish, and thus I will leave you in Egypt with our Lord, who, as I think, and as others also hold, began thenceforward to make little crosses when He had time to spare, after having helped St Joseph in any little thing, testifying even then the desire He had for the work of our redemption.

CONFERENCE IV.

CORDIALITY.

In which it is asked how the sisters ought to love one another with a cordial love, yet without too much familiarity. And on the spirit of humility.

In order to answer your question, and to make it clear in what consists the cordial love with which the sisters should love each other, you must know that cordiality is nothing else than the essence of true and sincere friendship, which can exist only between reasonable persons, who foment and nourish their friendship by means of reason; for otherwise it cannot be friendship, but only love. Thus the beasts have love, but cannot have friendship, since they are irrational; they have love among themselves, caused by some natural correspondence; they even have love for man, as experience every day shows, and divers authors have

written admirable things about it; as what they tell of that dolphin which so desperately loved a young child, whom he had seen several times on the seashore, that the child dying, the dolphin also died of grief. But that ought not to be called friendship, inasmuch as there should be the correspondence of friendship between the two who love each other, and this friendship must be contracted through the medium of reason. Thus, most of the friendships which men make, not having a good end, and not being guided by reason, do not at all deserve the name of friendship. Moreover, there must be, besides the intervention of reason, a certain correspondence, either of vocation, or of pursuit, or of quality between those who contract a friendship, as we are clearly taught by experience. For is it not the case that there is no friendship stronger or more true than that between brothers? The love which fathers have for their children is not called friendship, nor that of children for their fathers, because it has not that correspondence we are speaking of, but is of a different nature; the love of fathers being majestic and full of authority, and that of children a love of respect and submission; but between brothers, on account of the resemblance of their condition, the correspondence of their love produces a firm, strong, and solid friendship. This is why the Christians of the early Church all called each other brothers; and when this first fervour became cool among the generality of Christians, religious orders were instituted, in which it was ordained that all the religious should call one another brothers and sisters, as a mark of the sincere and truly cordial friendship which they have or ought to have for each other. And as there is

no friendship comparable to that of brothers, all other friendships being either unequal, or artificially made, (like those between married persons, which are made by contracts written and pronounced by notaries, or by simple promises); so, those friendships which worldly people contract either for some private interest, or for some frivolous reason, are exceedingly liable to perish and be dissolved. But that which exists between brethren is quite the reverse; for it is without artifice, and therefore very praiseworthy. This being the case, I say it is on this account that religious call each other brothers, and have a love which truly deserves the name, not of a common, but of a cordial friendship; that is to say, of a friendship which has its foundation in the heart. We must learn then that love has its seat in the heart, and that we can never love our neighbour too much, nor exceed the bounds of reason in this love, provided it resides in the heart; but as to the profession of this love, we may easily fail and exceed, passing beyond the rules of reason. The glorious St. Bernard says, that the measure of loving God is to love Him without measure, and that there should be no bounds to our love of Him, but we must let it spread its branches as far as it can. What is said of God, may be understood also of the love of our neighbour; provided however that the love of God is always uppermost and holds the first rank; but after that we ought to love our sisters with all the strength of our heart, and not to be content with loving them as ourselves, as the commandments of God oblige us to do, but we ought to love them more than ourselves, in order to observe the rules of evangelical perfection which require it of us.

Our Lord Himself has said, "Love one another, as I have loved you."* This is most worthy of consideration; love one another as I have loved you, that means, more than yourselves. And as our Lord always preferred us to Himself, and still does so as often as we receive Him in the most holy Sacrament, making Himself our food; so does He wish that we should have such a love for each other, that we should always prefer our neighbour to ourselves. And as He has done everything that could be done for us, except condemning Himself to hell, which He could not and ought not to have done, because He could not commit sin, which alone leads to damnation; so He wills, and the rule of perfection requires, that we should do all that we can for each other, except losing our souls; short of that, our friendship ought to be so firm, cordial, and solid, that we should never refuse to do or to suffer anything whatever for our neighbours or for our sisters. Now, this cordial love should be accompanied by two virtues, one of which is called affability, and the other good conversation. Affability is that which throws a certain sweetness over the serious affairs and communications which we have with each other; good conversation is what renders us gracious and agreeable in the recreations and less serious intercourse that we have with our neighbour. All virtues have, as you know, two contrary vices, which are the extremes of the virtue. The virtue, then, of affability is midway between two vices, of too great gravity or seriousness, and of too great softness in caressing and saying frequently words which tend to

* St. John, xiii. 34.

flattery. Now the virtue of affability keeps between too much and too little, bestowing caresses according to the necessities of those with whom one treats, preserving nevertheless the sweet gravity that is required by the persons and the affairs concerned. I say that we must make use of caresses at certain times, for it would not be seasonable to attend on a sick person with as much gravity as one would have elsewhere, not choosing to caress her more than if she were in good health. Nor should we bestow caresses too frequently, nor say sweet words on all occasions, throwing them, as it were, by handfuls at the first persons we meet; for as when there is too much sugar in a dish, it becomes disgusting, because it is too sweet and insipid; so we should be disgusted with too many caresses, and no longer care for them, knowing that they were given from habit. The dishes into which salt had been put by large handfuls would be disagreeable from their bitterness, but those into which salt and sugar have been put by measure, are agreeable to the taste; in like manner the caresses which are given with measure and discretion become agreeable and profitable to those who receive them. The virtue of good conversation requires that we should contribute to holy and moderate joy, and to the gracious discourse which may give consolation and recreation to our neighbour, so that we may not cause her weariness by our frowning and melancholy countenances, or by refusing to recreate at the time appointed for it. We shall treat of this virtue in the Conference on Modesty; therefore, I pass on, and say that it is a very difficult thing always to hit the mark at which we aim It is indeed true, that we all must

aim at succeeding and reaching the virtue, which we ought ardently to desire; but yet we must not lose courage nor be astonished when we do not attain to the very essence of it, provided we do not miss it altogether, but come as near to it as we can; for it is a thing that even the saints have not been able to do in all virtues, no one but our Lord and our Lady having been able to do it; for the saints have practised them very differently. Is there not a difference, I ask, between the spirit of St. Augustine and that of St. Jerome? We may remark it in their writings. There is nothing more sweet than St. Augustine, his writings are gentleness and sweetness itself; on the contrary, St. Jerome was extremely austere. To know something of it, look at him in his Epistles—he is almost always angry. Nevertheless, they were both exceedingly virtuous, but one had more sweetness, the other more austerity of life; and both, though not equally sweet nor rigorous, were great saints. So, we see, that we must not be surprised if we are not all equally sweet and gentle, provided we love our neighbour with a heartfelt love to the utmost of our power, and as our Lord has loved us, that is to say, more than ourselves, preferring her always to ourselves in the order of holy charity, and refusing her nothing that can contribute to her good, except the loss of our souls, as I have already said. We must, however, try, as far as we can, to render the exterior marks of our affection consistent with reason, to laugh with those that laugh, to weep with those that weep.

I say that we must show that we love our sisters without being too familiar, and this is the second part

of the question. The rule says so. But let us see how we must do this; only by letting holiness appear in familiarity and in our proofs of affection, as St. Paul says in one of his Epistles, "Salute one another in a holy kiss."* It was the custom when Christians met, to kiss each other. Our Lord used this form of salutation to His apostles, as we learn from the betrayal of Judas. In former times, holy religious when they met, used to say, "Deo gratias," as a proof of the great satisfaction they felt in seeing each other; as if they had said, or meant to say, "I give thanks to God, my dear brother, for the consolation He gives me in seeing you." Thus, my dear daughters, we must show that we love our sisters, and that we are happy with them; provided that holiness always accompanies the proofs we give them of our affection, and that not only God may not thereby be offended, but that He may be thereby praised and glorified. The same St. Paul, who teaches us that we should testify our affections holily, wishes and teaches us to do it graciously, giving us the example; "Salute," he says, "such a one who knows well that I love him with all my heart, and such a one who ought to be sure that I love him as my brother, and particularly his mother, who well knows that she is mine also."

You ask, on this subject, if one may venture to show more affection to a sister whom one esteems more virtuous, than to another. I answer that though we are bound to love more those who are more virtuous, with the love of complacency, yet we ought not to love them

* 1 Corinthians xvi. 20

more with the love of benevolence, nor to show them more signs of friendship; and that for two reasons. The first is that our Lord did not do so; He seems even to have shown more affection for the imperfect than the perfect, since He said that He came not for the just but for sinners. It is to those who have most need of us, that we ought more particularly to show our love; for it is thus that we best show that we love out of charity, and not by loving those who give us more consolation than trouble. And in this we must act according to what is required by the good of our neighbour; beyond that, we must endeavour to love all equally; since our Lord did not say, Love those who are more virtuous; but indifferently, "Love one another as I have loved you," without excluding any one however imperfect he may be. The second reason why we should not give proofs of affection to some more than to others, and should not allow ourselves to love them more, is that we cannot judge which are the most perfect, and have the most virtue; for external appearances are deceitful; and very often those who seem to you to be the most virtuous, as I have said elsewhere, are not so before God, who alone can discern them. It may be that a sister whom you see fall very often, and commit many imperfections, may be more virtuous and more pleasing to God, either by the great courage she keeps up amidst her imperfections, not letting herself be troubled or disturbed at seeing herself so liable to fall, or by the humility she derives from it, or again by the love of her abjection, than another, who may have a dozen virtues, natural or acquired, and has less exercise and trial and perhaps in consequence less

courage and humility, than the other whom you see so subject to failures. St. Peter was chosen to be the chief of the Apostles, though he was subject to many imperfections; so that he committed some even after he had received the Holy Ghost. But because notwithstanding these faults he always had great courage and was not astonished at them, our Lord made him His vicegerent, and favoured him above all the others; so that no one would have been right in saying that he did not deserve to be preferred and favoured above St. John or the other Apostles. We must then keep the affection we ought to have for our sisters as equal as we can, for the above reasons. And all ought to know that we love them with this love of the heart; and therefore there is no need to use so many words, that we love them dearly, that we have a certain inclination to love them particularly, and such like. For when we have an inclination for one more than for others, the love we bear her is not the more perfect for that, but perhaps the more liable to change on the least thing that she may do to us. If it is true that we have an inclination to love one more than another, we must not amuse ourselves with thinking about it, still less with telling her of it. For we ought not to love from inclination; we ought to love our neighbour either because he is virtuous, or for the hope we have that he will become so; but principally because such is the will of God.

Now to show rightly that we love him, we must procure him all the good we can, as well for the soul as for the body, praying for him, and serving him cordially when the occasion presents itself; inasmuch as the

affection which ends in fine words is no great thing, and is not loving as our Lord has loved us; Who did not content Himself with assuring us that He loved us, but would go farther, doing all that He did in proof of His love. St. Paul, speaking to his very dear children, says, I am quite ready to give my life for you, and to employ myself so absolutely that I will make no reserve, in order to show you how dearly and tenderly I love you. Yes, indeed, he meant to say, I am ready to go through everything that can happen to me, for you and by you. In which he teaches us that to employ ourselves, and even to give our life for our neighbour, is not of so much value as to let ourselves be employed at the pleasure of others, either by them, or for them. This was what he had learnt from our sweet Saviour on the cross. It is to this sovereign degree of love for our neighbour, that religious, and we who are consecrated to the service of God, are called. For it is not enough to assist our neighbour with our temporal conveniences; neither is it enough, says St. Bernard, to employ our own person in suffering for this love; we must pass on farther, letting ourselves be employed for him, by holy obedience, and by him, in any way he wishes, without ever resisting; for when we employ ourselves, by the choice of our own will and our own election, we always give great satisfaction to our self-love. But to let ourselves be employed in the things which others wish and we do not wish, that is to say which we do not choose; there lies the sovereign degree of abnegation. As when we wish to preach, but are sent to serve the sick; when we wish to pray for our neighbour, but are sent to serve him; that which we

are made to do is always worth more, beyond comparison, (I assume that it is not contrary to God and does not offend Him) than what we do or choose to do ourselves. Let us then love each other well, and for this end let us make use of this most powerful motive to excite us to this holy charity, that our Lord upon the cross shed even to the last drop of His blood on the earth, as if to make a sacred cement, with which He wished to cement, unite, join and attach all the stones of His Church, which are the faithful, one to another; in order that this union might be so strong that there should never be any division in it; so much did He fear that this division would cause eternal damnation.

The bearing with the imperfections of our neighbour is one of the principal points of this love: our Lord, who had a heart so gentle towards us and loved us so dearly, showed this to us on the cross; us, I say, and even those who caused His death, and were in the act of the most enormous sin that man could ever commit. For the sin that the Jews committed, was a monster of wickedness; and nevertheless our sweet Saviour had thoughts of love for them, giving us an example quite beyond imagination, in excusing those who were crucifying and insulting Him with a most barbarous rage; and seeking out inventions to obtain from His Father their pardon even in the act of sin and injury. O how miserable we are, we worldly people! for hardly can we forget an injury that has been done to us, long after we have received it. Yet he who prevents his neighbour with the benedictions of sweetness, is the most perfect imitator of our Lord. We must further remark

that cordial love is attached to a virtue which is as it were dependent on this love; and this is a perfectly childlike confidence. Children, when they have some fine feather or anything that they think pretty, never rest till they have met all their little companions, to show them their feather and make them share their joy; as they also will have them share their grief; for as soon as they have a little pain in their finger, they do not cease to tell it to all whom they meet, in order that people may pity them and blow a little upon the hurt. Now I do not say that we ought to be quite like these children; but I say that this confidence ought to make the sisters not shy of communicating their little graces and consolations to their sisters, not fearing either that they should remark their imperfections. I do not say that if one had some extraordinary gift from God, it should be told to everybody; no; but as to our little consolations, and our little graces, I wish that we should not be reserved, but that when the occasion presented itself, we should communicate them freely and simply to each other, not by way of boasting, but in simple confidence. And as regards our faults, we should not take pains to conceal them; for they are no better for not being seen. The sisters will not on that account think you have none; and your imperfections will be perhaps more dangerous than if they were discovered, and made you feel confusion, as they do to those who more readily let them appear exteriorly. We must not then be surprised nor discouraged when we commit imperfections and faults before our sisters; we ought, on the contrary, to be very glad that we are recognised for such as we are. You may have committed a fault or made a

blunder, it is true; but it is before your sisters, who love you dearly, and therefore will know how to bear with your fault, and will have more compassion for you than passion against you. And this confidence would greatly foster cordiality, and the tranquillity of our minds, which are liable to be disturbed when we are known to have failed in anything however trifling it may be, as if it were a great wonder that we are imperfect. Lastly, in conclusion of this discourse, we must always remember that for any failing in sweetness, which one sometimes commits from thoughtlessness, we must not be vexed, nor judge that cordiality is wanting; for we have it notwithstanding. An action done now and then, provided it is not frequent, does not make a person vicious, especially when he has the good will to amend.

QUESTION II.

What it is to do everything in the spirit of humility, as the Constitutions ordain.

To understand this better, we must know that as there is a difference between pride, the habit of pride, and the spirit of pride (for if you make an act of pride, that is pride; if you make these acts on all occasions, that is the habit of pride; if you take pleasure in these acts and seek them, that is the spirit of pride); in like manner there is a difference between humility, the habit of humility, and the spirit of humility. Humility is to do some act to humble oneself: the habit of it is to do such acts frequently and on all occasions that pre-

sent themselves; but the spirit of humility is to take pleasure in humiliation, to seek for abjection and humility in everything; that is to say, that in all we do, say or desire, our principal aim should be to humble and abase ourselves, and that we should take pleasure in finding our own abjection on all occasions, and dearly love the thought of it. Now this is doing everything in the spirit of humility; and it is the same as if we said, seeking humility and abjection in everything. It is a good practice of humility, to consider the actions of others only to remark the virtues and never the imperfections; for when we have no charge over them, we must not turn our eyes, still less our attention, that way. We must always interpret in the best sense we can what we see our neighbour do; and in doubtful things we must persuade ourselves that what we have perceived is not evil, but that it is our imperfection that causes such thoughts; in order to avoid rash judgments on the actions of others, which is a very dangerous evil, and to be detested above all others. In things evidently bad, we must have compassion, and humble ourselves for our neighbour's faults, as if they were our own, and pray God for their amendment with the same earnestness that we should for our own, if we were subject to the same defects.

But what can we do, you say, to acquire this spirit of humility such as we have described? Oh! there is no other way of acquiring this, or any other virtue, than by repeated acts.

Humility makes us annihilate ourselves in all things that are not necessary for our advancement in grace, such as speaking well; making a fine appearance, great

talents for the management of external things, a great mind, eloquence, and such like; for in these exterior things we should wish others to do better than ourselves.

CONFERENCE V.

GENEROSITY.

To understand well what is that strength and generosity of spirit about which you ask me, and in what it consists, I must first answer a question you have often asked; that is, in what true humility consists: inasmuch as in resolving this point I shall make myself better understood in speaking of the second, which is generosity of spirit, of which you wish me now to treat.

Humility, then, is nothing else but a perfect acknowledgment that we are no more than a mere nothing; and it keeps us in this opinion of ourselves. For the better understanding of this, we must know that there are in us two sorts of possessions; some which are in us and of us; the others which are in us but not of us. When I say that we have things which are of us, I do not mean that they do not come from God, and that we have them of ourselves; for in truth of ourselves we have nothing else but misery and nothingness; but I mean that they are possessions which God has so placed in us that they seem to belong to us; such are health, riches, science, and other similar things. Now, humi-

lity prevents us from glorifying and esteeming ourselves on account of these things, inasmuch as it sets no value on them whatever; and indeed that is but reasonable, since they are not fixed possessions, which make us more agreeable to God, but are mutable and subject to fortune. And were it not so, is there anything less certain than riches which depend on weather and the seasons? than beauty which fades in less than no time? It needs only a mole on the face to take away its brilliancy; and as for sciences, a little disturbance of the brain is enough to make us lose and forget all that we knew. It is then with very good reason that humility makes no account of all those possessions; but as much as it abases and humbles us by the knowledge of what we are of ourselves, by the low value it sets on all that is in and of us; so much also does it make us greatly esteem the good that is in us, and not of us, as faith, hope, love of God, however little of them we may have; as also a certain capacity which God has given us, of uniting ourselves to Him by means of grace; and with regard to us, our vocation, which gives us the assurance (as far as we can have it in this life) of the possession of eternal glory and felicity; and the esteem in which humility holds all these things, that is, faith, hope, and charity, is the foundation of generosity of spirit. Do you see? these first possessions of which we have spoken, belong to humility, for its exercise, and the others to generosity. Humility thinks it can do nothing, owing to its knowledge of the poverty and weakness which are in us; and on the contrary, generosity makes us say with St. Paul: "I can do all things

in Him who strengtheneth me."* Humility makes us distrust ourselves; and generosity makes us trust in God. You see, then, that these two virtues of humility and generosity are so united and joined to each other, that they never are and never can be separated. There are persons who amuse themselves with a false and foolish humility, which prevents them from looking at the good that God has placed in them. They are very wrong; for the good things which God has given us ought to be recognised, esteemed, and greatly honoured, and not held in the same rank of low esteem as those which are in us, and of ourselves. Not only have true Christians acknowledged that we ought to consider these two sorts of good which are in us, the one to humble ourselves, the other to glorify the Divine goodness which has given them to us; but philosophers also have done the same. For this saying of theirs: "Know thyself," must be understood not only of the knowledge of our misery and vileness, but also of that of the excellence and dignity of our souls, which are capable of being united to the Divinity by His divine goodness, which has given us a certain instinct, making us always tend and aspire to this union in which consists all our happiness.

That humility which does not produce generosity is undoubtedly false; for after it has said, "I can do nothing, I am no more than mere nothingness;" it immediately gives place to generosity of spirit, which says, "There is nothing and there can be nothing that I cannot do, because I put all my confidence in God, who can do all things;" and in this

* Philippians iv. 13.

confidence, she undertakes courageously to do all that is commanded her. But remark that I say, all that is commanded or counselled her, however difficult it may be: for I can assure you that she does not judge it impossible to do miracles, if she is commanded to do them. If she sets herself to the execution of the command in simplicity of heart, God will work a miracle rather than fail to give her the power to accomplish her undertaking, because she undertakes it in a confidence founded not on her own strength, but on her esteem of the gifts which God has given her. And therefore she holds this discourse within herself, "If God calls me to so high a state of perfection that there is none higher in this life, what can prevent my attaining to it? since I am well assured that He who has begun the work of my perfection will finish it." But take care that all this be done without any presumption; inasmuch as this confidence does not prevent our being always on our guard, for fear of failing; but renders us more attentive to ourselves, more vigilant and careful to do what may serve to the advancement of our perfection. Humility consists not only in distrusting ourselves, but also in trusting in God: and the distrust of ourselves and of our own strength produces confidence in God; and from this confidence springs the generosity of spirit of which we are speaking.

The most holy Virgin our Lady furnished us with a very remarkable example on this subject, when she pronounced these words: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word."*

* St. Luke i. 38.

In saying that she is the handmaid of the Lord, she makes the greatest act of humility that can be made; for she opposes to the praise given her by the Angel, that she is to be the Mother of God, and that the Child to be born of her shall be called the Son of the Most High, a dignity the greatest that one could ever imagine; she opposes I say, to all praises and greatness, her lowness and unworthiness, saying that she is the handmaid of the Lord. But take notice that as soon as she has done what is due to humility, she immediately makes a very excellent act of generosity, saying: "Be it done to me according to thy word." It is true, she meant to say, that I am not in any way capable of this grace, with regard to what I am of myself; but since all that is good in me is from God, and that what you tell me is His most holy will, I believe that it can be and that it will be done; and therefore she says without any doubt: "Be it done to me according to thy word."

In like manner, for want of this generosity, we make very few acts of true contrition, because after having humbled and confounded ourselves before the Divine Majesty in consideration of our great infidelities, we do not go on to make that act of confidence, raising our courage by the assurance we ought to feel that the Divine Goodness will give us His grace to be faithful to Him in future, and to correspond more perfectly to His love. After this act of confidence, we ought immediately to make one of generosity, saying, "Since I am well assured that the grace of God will not fail me, I also believe that He will not permit that I should fail to correspond to His grace." But you will say to

me, "If I fail to correspond to grace, it will also fail me." That is true. "If then this is so, who will assure me that I shall not in future be wanting to grace, since I have so often failed in times past?" I answer that generosity makes the soul say boldly, and without any fear, "No, I will no more be unfaithful to God." And because she feels in her heart this resolution never to be so, she undertakes without fear whatever she knows may render her agreeable to God, without any exception; and undertaking everything, she believes that she can do everything, not of herself, but in God, in whom she places all her confidence; and in this confidence she does or undertakes all that is commanded or counselled her. But you will ask me if it is never permitted to doubt our being capable of doing the things that are commanded us? I answer that generosity of spirit never permits us to entertain any doubt. And in order that you may understand this better, you must distinguish, as I am accustomed to tell you, the superior part of your soul from the inferior. Now, when I say that generosity does not permit us to doubt, it is to be understood of the superior part; for it may well be that the inferior will be quite full of these doubts, and will have great difficulty in receiving the charge or employment that is given us. But the generous soul laughs at all that and makes no account of it, putting herself simply into the exercise of that charge without saying a single word, or doing any action to show the feeling she has of her incapacity. But some of us are beyond anything delighted to show that we are very humble, and that we hold ourselves in low esteem, and such like things, which are anything but

true humility, for that never permits us to resist the judgments of those whom God has given us for our guidance.

I have put in the book of the Introduction an example which applies to this subject, and which is very remarkable. It is that of King Achaz, who being reduced to very great distress by the cruel war waged against him by two other kings, who had besieged Jerusalem, God commanded the Prophet Isaias to go and console him in His name, and to promise that he should gain the victory, and triumph over his enemies. And, moreover, Isaias told him that in proof of the truth of what he had said, he should ask of God a sign either in heaven or on earth, and it should be granted to him. Then Achaz, mistrusting the goodness and liberality of God, said, "No, I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord."* But the miserable man did not say that for the honour of God; on the contrary, he refused to honour Him, because God wished to be glorified at that time by miracles, and Achaz refused to ask of Him one which He had signified His desire of granting. He offended God, by refusing to obey the prophet whom God had sent him to signify to him His will. We must, then, never doubt that we can do what is commanded us, since those who command us well know our capacity. But you say that you may have many interior miseries and great imperfections of which your superiors are not aware, and that their opinion is based upon external appearances, by which you have perhaps deceived them.

* Isaias, vii. 12.

I say that you are not always to be believed when you say, perhaps under the influence of discouragement, that you are miserable and quite full of imperfections; nor is it to be believed that you have none when you do not speak of them, being usually such as your works make you appear. Your virtues are known by your fidelity in practising them, and in like manner imperfections are known by actions. One cannot deceive the judgment of superiors, if one does not feel any malice in one's heart. But you tell me that many saints have made great resistance to receiving the charges that were to be given them. Now, what they did, was not only on account of their low esteem of themselves, but principally because they saw that those who wished to put them into these charges founded their opinion on apparent virtues, such as fasts, alms, penances, and bodily austerities, and not on the true interior virtues, which they kept covered and concealed under holy humility; besides, they were pursued and sought after by people who knew them only by reputation. In this case it would, it seems, be permitted to make a little resistance, but do you know to whom? To a sister of Dijon, for example, to whom a superioress of Annecy should send a command to be superioress, never having seen or known her. But a sister of this house, who should receive the same command, should never bring forward any reason to show that she dislikes the command; but should begin the exercise of her charge with as much peace and courage as if she felt herself quite capable of discharging it well.

But I well understand the artifice; it is that we are afraid of not coming out with honour to ourselves; we

have so great a regard for our reputation, that we will not be taken for apprentices in the exercise of our charges, but for masters and mistresses who never make mistakes. You now understand well enough what that spirit of strength and generosity is, which we so much desire to see here; in order to banish hence all the silliness and tenderness which only serve to arrest us on our road, and to prevent our making progress in perfection. This tenderness is nourished by the vain reflections we make upon ourselves, chiefly when we have stumbled on our road through some fault. For here, by the grace of God, we do not entirely fall, we have never yet seen that happen; but we stumble; and instead of humbling ourselves gently, and then righting ourselves courageously, as we have said, we enter on the consideration of our poverty, and upon that we begin to pity ourselves. "Oh, my God, how miserable I am, I am fit for nothing!" And then we pass into discouragement, which makes us say, "Oh, no! there is no more hope of me—I shall never do anything good, it is losing time to talk to me;" and thereupon we almost wish to be let alone, as if it were quite certain that nothing could be made of us. Oh, my God! how far removed are all these things from the soul who is generous, and who greatly esteems, as I have said, the good which God has placed in her! For she is amazed, neither at the difficulty of the road she has to travel, nor at the greatness of the work, nor at the length of time it requires, nor, lastly, at the delay of the work she has undertaken. The daughters of the Visitation are all called to a very great perfection, and their enterprise is the highest and most sublime that can be imagined;

inasmuch as they have not only the design of uniting themselves to the will of God, as all creatures ought to have, but they aim besides at uniting themselves to His desires, and even to His intentions, I say, even almost before they are signified. And if there could be conceived a higher degree of perfection than conformity to the will of God, to His desires and intentions, they would doubtless undertake to rise to it, since they have a vocation which obliges them to it; and therefore our devotion ought to be a strong and generous devotion, as we have said several times.

But, besides what we have already said of this generosity, we must also say this, that the soul which possesses it receives alike dryness and the tenderness of consolation; alike interior weariness, sadness and dejection of mind, and the favours and prosperity of a spirit full of peace and tranquillity. And that because she considers that He who has given her consolations is the same who sends her afflictions; and that He sends her both, impelled by the same love which she recognises to be very great; because, by the interior affliction of spirit He intends to attract her to a very great degree of perfection, which is the abnegation of all sorts of consolations in this life, remaining well assured, that He who deprives her of them here below, will not deprive her of them eternally on high in heaven. You will tell me that you cannot, amidst that great darkness, make these considerations, since you seem not to be able even to say a single word to our Lord. Certainly you are right in saying you seem, for, in truth, it is not so. The sacred Council of Trent has decided and we are obliged to believe, that God and His grace never

abandon us in such a way that we cannot have recourse to His goodness, and protest that, in spite of all the troubles of our soul, we wish to be entirely His, and never to offend Him. But, observe that all this is in the superior part of our soul; and because the inferior part is not aware of it, and remains still in its suffering, we are troubled, and esteem ourselves very miserable. And upon that, we begin to pity ourselves as if it were a thing very worthy of compassion to see ourselves without consolation. Oh! for God's sake let us consider that our Lord and Master chose to be exercised in these interior trials, and that to an incomparable degree. Listen to the words which He speaks on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" * He was reduced to the last extremity, for it was only the highest point of His spirit that was not overwhelmed with languor. But remark that He betakes Himself to speaking to God, to show us that it would not be impossible for us to do so. "Which is the best at such a time," you ask, "to speak to God of our trouble and our misery, or to speak to Him of something else?" I answer, that in this, as in all sorts of temptations, it is better to divert our mind from its pain and trouble, by speaking to God of something else, than to speak to Him of our pain; for, undoubtedly, if we do speak of it, it will not be without exciting a tenderness of heart, which will revive and increase our pain, our nature being such that it cannot see its own sorrows without feeling great compassion for them. But you tell me that if you do not pay attention to it, you will not

* St Matthew xxvii. 46 and St. Mark xv. 34

remember to speak of it. And what matter? We are certainly like children who are eager to run and tell their mother that a bee has stung them, in order that she may pity them, and blow upon the hurt that is already cured; for we want to go and tell our mother that we have been much afflicted, and to increase our affliction, relating it all in detail, not omitting any little circumstance that may bring us a little more pity. Now are not these things very childish? If we have committed any infidelities, it is good to tell them; if we have been faithful, we must likewise say so, but shortly, without exaggerating either one or the other, for we must tell everything to those who have charge of our souls.

You tell me now that when you have had some great feeling of anger, or any other temptation, you always have a scruple if you do not confess it. I say that you must tell it in your review, but not in the way of confession. But, that we may derive instruction as to how it is to be done, I say, that must be when we do not see clearly that we have given any sort of consent; for if you were to say, "I accuse myself of having had strong feelings of anger during two days, but I have not consented to them;" you would be telling your virtues instead of your faults. "But I am in doubt whether I have not committed some fault." We must look carefully whether there is any ground for this doubt; perhaps for about a quarter of an hour, during these two days, you have been a little negligent in putting aside your feeling; if it is so, say simply that you have been negligent during a quarter of an hour in putting aside a feeling of anger that you had, without adding that the

temptation lasted two days; unless you wish to say either to get instruction from your confessor, or else as belonging to your reviews, for then it is very good to mention it. But in ordinary confessions, it would be better not to speak of it, since you do it only to satisfy yourself; and if you suffer a little uneasiness by not doing it, you must bear it like any other which you could not remedy. Dieu soit béni.

CONFERENCE VI.

HOPE.

On the departure of the Sisters of the Visitation, who were going to found a new House of their Institute.

Among the praises bestowed by the saints upon Abraham, St. Paul esteems this above all the others, that "he believed in hope even against hope."* God had promised him that his generation should be multiplied as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the sea; and yet he received the command to kill his son Isaac. Poor Abraham did not lose his hope, but he hoped even against hope, that if he obeyed the command given him to kill his son, still God would not fail to keep His word to him. Great, certainly, was his hope, for he could in no way see where to rest it, except on the word that God had given him. Oh, what a true and

* Romans iv. 18.

solid foundation is the word of God! for it is infallible. Abraham then goes out with unparalleled simplicity, to accomplish the will of God, making no further consideration nor reply, than he did when God had told him to leave his country and his relations, and to go to the place that He would show him, without specifying it to him, in order that he might embark more simply in the bark of His Divine Providence. Then, journeying three days and three nights, with his son Isaac carrying the wood of the sacrifice, that innocent soul asked his father, where was the victim, to which the good Abraham answered, "My son, God will provide."* Oh! how happy should we be, if we could accustom ourselves to make this answer to our hearts, when they are in anxiety about anything, "Our Lord will provide," and after that have no more care, anxiety, or trouble, than had Isaac! For after that, he was silent, believing that the Lord would provide, as his father had told him. Great, certainly, is the confidence that God requires us to have in His paternal care and in His divine Providence. But why should we not have it, seeing that no one ever can have been deceived by it? No one trusts in God without reaping the fruits of His confidence. I say this of ourselves; for, as to the people of the world, their confidence is often accompanied by apprehension; and is therefore of no value before God. Let us consider, I entreat you, what our Lord and Master said to His apostles to establish in them this holy and loving confidence; "I sent you into the world without scrip,

* Genesis xxii. 8.

without money, and without any provision either for your food or clothing; were you in want of anything?" And they said, "No." "Go," He said to them, "and think not what you shall eat, nor what you shall drink, nor wherewith you shall be clothed, nor even what you shall have to say before the great and the magistrates of the provinces through which you shall pass; for on each occasion your Heavenly Father will furnish you with whatever is necessary. Do not think of what you should say, for He will speak in you, and will put into your mouth the words that you have to say." "But I am so awkward," one of our sisters will say, "I do not know how to treat with great people, I have no learning." It is all the same. Go, and trust in God; for He has said, "Even though the mother should forget her child, I will never forget you, for I bear you engraved on my heart and on my hands." Do you think that He who takes good care to provide nourishment for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, who neither sow nor reap, will ever forget to provide with all that is necessary the man who fully trusts in His providence, since man is capable of being united to God our Sovereign Good?

It has seemed good to me to say this to you, my very dear sisters, on the subject of your departure; for if you are not capable of the apostolic dignity on account of your sex, you are nevertheless in a manner capable of the apostolic office; and you can, like the Apostles, render much service to God, by procuring in a certain way the advancement of His glory. Certainly, my dear daughters, this ought to be a source of great consolation to you, that God should make use of you for so excellent

a work as that to which you are called; and you ought to esteem yourselves greatly honoured by it before the Divine Majesty. For what does God desire of you but that which He commanded His Apostles? the reason for which He sent them throughout the world was, to do that which our Lord Himself came to do in this world, to give life to man; and not only that, He said, but that they might live with a more abundant life, that they might have life, and a better life; and this He did by giving them grace. The Apostles were sent by our Lord over all the earth for the same end; for our Lord said to them: "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you;" * go, and give life to men: but be not content with that; make them live, and live a more perfect life. By means of the doctrine which you will teach them, they will have life, by believing in my word which you will expound to them; but they will have a more abundant life by the good example you will give them: and care not whether your labour be followed by the fruit you seek; for it is not from you that the fruit will be demanded, but only whether you have employed yourselves faithfully in well cultivating these dry and sterile lands. You will not be asked whether you have reaped much, but only whether you have taken great care to sow. In like manner, my dear Daughters, you are now commanded to go here and there, to divers places, in order to induce souls to have life, and to live a better life. For what are you going to do, but to try to spread the knowledge of the perfection of your Institute, and by means of this know-

* St. John xx. 21.

ledge to attract many souls to embrace all the observances which are comprised and hidden in it? but without preaching and conferring the Sacraments, and remitting sins, as the Apostles did. Are not you going to give life to men? but to speak more properly, are not you going to give life to your daughters? since perhaps hundreds and hundreds of women who would have been lost remaining in the world, will after your example retire into your Order, and will enjoy incomprehensible felicity in Heaven to all eternity. And is it not by your means that life will be given them, and that they will have a more abundant life, that is to say a life more perfect and agreeable to God, a life that will render them capable of uniting themselves more perfectly to the Divine Goodness? for they will receive from you the instructions necessary to acquire the true and pure love of God, which is that more abundant life which our Lord came to give men. I have brought, He says, fire upon the earth; what do I ask or what do I seek, but that it should burn? And in another place, He commands that the fire should burn incessantly upon His altar, and that it should never be extinguished; to show with what ardour He desires that the fire of His love should be always burning on the altar of our heart. O God! what a favour it is that God does you! He makes you Apostles, not in dignity, but in office and merit; you do not preach, no, for your sex does not permit it, though St. Magdalen and her sister St. Martha did; but you will not fail to exercise the apostolic office by the communication of your manner of life, as I have just said. Go, then, full of courage to do that to which you are called; but go

in simplicity. If you have apprehensions, say to your soul: The Lord will provide. If the thought of your weakness troubles you, throw yourself on God, and trust in Him. The Apostles were for the most part fishermen and ignorant; God made them learned, according as it was necessary for the office He willed to give them. Trust in Him, lean upon His Providence, and fear nothing; do not say, "I have no talent for speaking well." No matter, go without arguing; for God will give you what you have to say and to do, when it shall be time. If you have no virtue, or perceive none in yourself, do not disturb yourself; for if, for the glory of God, or to satisfy obedience, you undertake the guidance of souls, or any other exercise, whatever it may be, God will take care of you, and will be bound to provide you with all that may be necessary, as well for you as for those whom God will put under your charge. It is true, that what you are undertaking is a thing of great consequence and great importance; but yet you would be wrong if you did not hope for good success, seeing that you do not undertake it by your own choice, but to comply with obedience. No doubt we have great reason to fear, when we seek for employments and offices, either in religion or elsewhere, and they are given us at our own request. But when it is not so, let us bend our necks humbly beneath the yoke of holy obedience, and let us willingly accept the burden: let us humble ourselves, for we must always do so: but let us always remember to establish generosity on acts of humility, for otherwise these acts of humility will be nothing worth.

I have an extreme desire to impress on your minds a

maxim of unparalleled utility; Ask for nothing and refuse nothing. No, my dear daughters, ask for nothing and refuse nothing; receive what is given you, and do not ask for what is not offered, or what they do not wish to give you: in this practice you will find the peace of your souls. Yes, my dear sisters, keep your hearts in this holy indifference, receiving all that is given you, and not desiring what is not given you; in one word, I mean, desire nothing, but leave yourselves and your affairs completely and perfectly to the care of Divine Providence. Let it govern you, just as children let themselves be governed by their nurses; whether it carry you on the right arm, or on the left, whether you are laid down, or lifted up, let it do just as it pleases, for a child would not complain: it is a good mother, who knows better than yourselves what is necessary for you. I mean to say, if Divine Providence permits afflictions and mortifications to happen to you, do not refuse them, but accept them with a willing heart, lovingly and quietly: if it does not send them, or does not permit them to come to you, do not desire them nor ask for them. In the same way, if consolations come to you, receive them in the spirit of thankfulness and gratitude towards the Divine goodness; if you have them not, do not desire them, but endeavour to keep your heart prepared to receive different events from Divine Providence as far as possible with the same disposition of heart. If they give you obediences in religion, which seem to you dangerous, such as superiorities, do not refuse them; if they do not give you them, do not desire them; and so in all things, I mean earthly things, for with regard to virtues,

we may and ought to desire and seek them from God; the love of God comprehends them all. You would not believe, without having experienced it, how profitable this practice will be to your souls; for instead of amusing yourselves with desiring first one means and then another, of becoming perfect, you will apply yourselves more simply and faithfully to those you meet with on your way.

Casting my eyes on the subject of your departure and on the inevitable sorrow you will all feel in separating from each other, I thought I ought to say some little thing to you which might diminish this grief, though I would not say that it is not permitted to weep a little; it must be, inasmuch as you could not refrain from it, having long lived so sweetly and lovingly together in the practice of the same exercises; which has so united your hearts, that doubtless they cannot bear any division or separation. Nor will you, my dear daughters, be at all divided or separated; for all go and all remain: those who go remain; and those who remain go, not in their own persons, but in the persons of those who go: and in the same way, those who go will remain in the persons of those who remain. This holy union formed by charity is one of the principal fruits of religion; a union such that of many hearts there is made but one heart, and one body is made of many members. All are in such wise made one in religion, that all the religious of one Order seem to be but one religious. The lay sisters chant the holy Office in the persons of those who are appointed to do it, as the others serve in the domestic offices in the persons of those who fulfil them: and why is it so? The reason

is quite evident, inasmuch as if those who are in the choir to chant the Office were not there, the others would be there in their place; if there were no Lay sisters to get ready the dinner, the Choir sisters would be employed; if such a sister were not superioress, another would be. In like manner, those who go away remain; and those who remain go away; for if those who are named to go, could not do it, those who remain would go instead of them. But what should make us willingly go or remain, is the almost infallible certainty we ought to feel that this separation is only as regards the body; for as regards the soul you will always remain most singularly united. This bodily separation is a very small thing; besides it must take place some day, whether we will or no: but separation of heart, and disunion of spirit, that alone is to be dreaded. Now, as for ourselves, not only shall we remain always united together; but still more, our union will go on every day perfecting itself, and this sweet and most amiable bond of holy charity will be ever more and more tightened and confirmed, in proportion as we advance in the way of our own perfection. For in rendering ourselves more capable of being united to God, we shall unite ourselves more closely with each other; and at each Communion that we receive, our union will become more perfect: for by uniting ourselves with the Lord, we shall remain ever more united together; and so the sacred reception of this celestial bread and most adorable Sacrament is called Communion.* O God! what a union is that which exists

* "Communion, c'est-à-dire: comme union."

between each religious of the same order! a union such that the spiritual riches are as much mingled and put in common, as the exterior goods. The religious has nothing belonging to him in private, because of the holy vow he has made of voluntary poverty; and by the sacred profession which religious make of most holy charity, all their virtues are in common, all participate in each others' good works and will enjoy the fruits of them, provided they keep themselves always in charity and in the observance of the rules of the Institute to which God has called them. As he who is in any domestic office, or in any other employment whatever, contemplates in the person of him who is at prayer in the choir; so he who reposes shares in the labour of the other who is employed by command of the superior.

See then, my dear daughters, how those who go away remain, and those who remain go away; and how all of you alike ought lovingly and courageously to embrace obedience, as well on this occasion as on all others; since those who remain will have a share in the labour and the fruit of the journey of those who go, as they will have a share in the tranquillity and repose of those who remain.

No doubt, my dear daughters, you all stand in need of many virtues and of care in practising them, as well in going as in staying. For those who go need much courage and confidence in God, to undertake lovingly and in the spirit of humility what God requires of them, surmounting all the little regrets they might feel in quitting the house where God first placed them, the sisters they have so dearly loved, and whose conversa-

tion brought such consolation to their souls, the tranquillity of their retreat which is so dear to them, their relations, acquaintances, and what shall I say? many things to which human nature attaches itself while we are in this life. Those who stay behind are equally in need of courage, both to persevere in the practice of holy submission, humility, and tranquillity, and also to be ready to go away when it may be commanded them. Since as you see, my dear sisters, your Institute is extending itself on all sides, in so many different places; so also ought you to strive to increase and multiply acts of virtue, and to strengthen your courage in order to render yourselves capable of being employed according to the will of God. It certainly seems to me, when I look at and consider the commencement of your Institute, that it well represents the history of Abraham. When God had given him the promise that his race should be multiplied as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the sea; he nevertheless commanded him to sacrifice his son, through whom the promise of God was to be accomplished. Abraham hoped, and confirmed himself in his hope even against hope itself, and his hope was not vain but fruitful. In the same manner, when the three first sisters joined together and embraced this way of life, God had designed from all eternity to bless their generation, and to give them one which should be greatly multiplied. But who could have believed it, since in shutting them up in their little house, we thought of nothing else but of making them die to the world? They were sacrificed; nay more, they sacrificed themselves voluntarily; and God took such pleasure in their sacrifice, that He gave them not only a new life for

themselves, but a life so abundant that they were able by His grace to communicate it to many other souls, as we now see. It certainly seems to me that these three first sisters are extremely well represented by the three grains of corn that were among the straw in the chariot of Triptolemus, in which his arms were kept: for being carried into a country where there was no corn, these three grains were taken and thrown upon the ground, and produced others in such quantities that in a few years all the land in that country was sown with them. The Providence of our good God threw with His blessed hand these three sisters upon the land of the Visitation; and after having remained for a time hidden from the eyes of the world, they produced the fruit which is now seen; so that in a short time all these countries will share the benefits of your Institute. O how happy are the souls who dedicate themselves truly and absolutely to the service of God! for God never leaves them barren and unfruitful. For a mere nothing which they leave for God, God gives them incomparable rewards, as well in this life as in the other. What a grace is it to be employed in the service of souls that God loves so dearly, and for whose salvation our Lord suffered so much! It is, indeed, an unparalleled honour, and one you should, my dear daughters, highly esteem, and in order to employ yourselves faithfully therein, spare neither trouble, care, nor labour; for all will be amply recompensed; though this should not be the motive for your encouragement, but that of rendering yourselves more agreeable to God, and the more augmenting His glory. Go, then, and continue courageously in this practice, and do not amuse yourselves

with fancying that you do not see in yourselves what is necessary, I mean the talents fitted for the offices in which you will be employed. It is better that we should not see them in ourselves; for it keeps us humble, and gives us more reason to mistrust our own strength and ourselves, and makes us cast more absolutely all our confidence on God. So long as we are not required to practise a virtue, it is better that we should not have it: when we want it, provided we are faithful in those we have now to practise, we may rest assured that God will give us each in its own time. Let us not amuse ourselves with desiring or aiming at anything; let us leave ourselves entirely in the hands of Divine Providence; let it do with us whatever it pleases. For why should we desire one thing rather than another? ought not everything to be indifferent? Provided we please God, and love His Divine Will, that ought to suffice us. For my part, I wonder how we can like to be employed in one thing rather than in another, especially being in religion, where one office or work is as agreeable to God as another, since it is obedience which gives the value to all the practices of religion; if the choice were given us, the most abject would be the most desirable and those which we ought to embrace the most lovingly; but as we have not the choice, let us embrace them all with equal willingness. When the office that is given us is honourable before men, let us keep ourselves humble before God; when it is abject before men, let us hold ourselves more honoured before the Divine Goodness. In short, my dear daughters, remember lovingly and faithfully what I have told you, whether with regard to the interior or

the exterior: wish for nothing but what God wills for you, embrace lovingly all events and the divers effects of His Divine Will, without amusing yourselves in any way with anything else.

After this, what could I say to you, my dear Sisters, since it seems to me that all our happiness is comprised in this most amiable practice? I will put before you the example of the Israelites, with which I will finish. Having remained long without a king, they conceived a desire to have one, such is the folly of the human mind! As if God would have left them without guidance, or would not have taken care to rule, govern, and defend them. They addressed themselves therefore to the Prophet, who promised to ask it of God for them, which he did; and God, irritated at their request, answered that He would grant it, but that He warned them that the king they should have would assume such dominion and authority over them that he would take their children from them; and make their sons tithing men, and others soldiers and captains; and as to their daughters, he would make some cooks, others bakers, and others perfumers. Our Lord does the same, my dear daughters, with the souls that dedicate themselves to His service; for, as you see, in religion there are divers offices and divers employments. But what is it that I mean to say? only this, that it seems to me the Divine Majesty has chosen you who are going, as perfumers, or sellers of perfumes; yes, certainly, for you are commissioned by Him to go and spread the most sweet odours of the virtues of your Institute: and as young girls are fond of sweet odours (as the sacred spouse says in the Canticle of Canticles, that the name

of her Beloved is as an oil* or balsam that spreads on all sides infinitely agreeable odours: and she adds, therefore, young maidens have followed Him, attracted by His divine perfumes:) so, my dear Sisters, do you, as perfumers of the Divine Goodness, go and spread so effectually on all sides the incomparable odour of very sincere humility, sweetness, and charity, that many young maidens may be attracted by your perfumes and embrace your mode of life, by which they may, like you, enjoy in this life a sweet and loving peace and tranquillity of soul, and afterwards enjoy eternal felicity in the other. Your congregation is like a hive of bees, which has already sent forth several swarms; but yet with this difference, that the bees go forth to retire into another hive, and there begin a new settlement: each swarm choosing a separate queen, under whom they fight and retreat. But as for you, my dear souls, if you go into a new hive (that is to say, if you go and begin a new house of your Order) you still have always one and the same King, who is our crucified Lord, under whose authority you will live in security wherever you may be. Fear not that anything will be wanting to you; for He will be always with you so long as you do not choose any other: only take great care to increase your love and your fidelity towards His Divine Goodness, keeping yourselves as near to Him as possible, and all will turn to your good. Learn from Him all that you have to do; do nothing without His counsel: for He is the faithful friend who will guide and govern you, and will take care of you, as with all my heart I entreat Him to do. Dieu soit béni.

* Cant. i. 2.

CONFERENCE VII.

THREE SPIRITUAL LAWS.

In which the properties of the dove are applied to the religious soul in the form of laws.

You have asked me for some new laws at the beginning of this new year; and thinking over what I could give you, to be both useful and agreeable to you, I turned my thoughts to the Gospel of the day, which mentions the baptism of our Lord, and the glorious apparition of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove; upon this apparition I have dwelt, and, considering that the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and of the Son, I have thought that I must give you laws all of love, which I have taken from the doves, because the Holy Spirit chose to take the form of a dove; and still more, because all souls dedicated to the service of the Divine Majesty are bound to be like chaste and loving doves. Thus, we see that the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles, is often called by this name, and certainly with good reason; for there is a great similarity between the qualities of the dove and those of the loving spouse of our Lord. The laws of doves are all infinitely agreeable, and it is a very sweet meditation to consider them. What more beautiful law can there be than that of purity? For nothing is more pure than doves; they are wonderfully cleanly. Although there is nothing more dirty than the dove-cotes and the places where

they make their nests, yet no one ever saw a dove dirty, they always have their plumage glossy and shining beautifully in the sun. Consider, I beg of you, in the second place, how agreeable is the law of their simplicity; for our Lord Himself praises it, saying to His apostles, "Be wise as serpents, and simple as doves."* But, in the third place, oh my God, how agreeable is the law of their sweetness! for they are without gall and without bitterness; and a hundred other laws they have which are infinitely amiable and proper to be observed by souls that are dedicated in religion to the more special service of the Divine Goodness. But I have thought that if I gave you laws that you had already, you would not much esteem them. I have therefore chosen only three, which, if well observed, are of unequalled utility, and which bring very great sweetness to the soul that considers them, because they are entirely of love, and most delicately adapted to the perfection of the spiritual life. They are three secrets, as excellent for acquiring perfection, as they are little known to those who make a profession of acquiring it, at least to the greater number of them. But what then are these laws? The first that I intend to give you is that of the doves, who do all for their mate, and nothing for themselves. They seem to say nothing else but this, "My dear mate is all for me, and I am all for him; he is always turned towards me to think of me; and on my part I expect it, and am confident of it; let this beloved one, then, go where he pleases, in search of food, I shall not mistrust his love, but shall fully confide in his care." You may,

perhaps, have seen, but not remarked, that the doves while they sit upon their eggs, do not stir from off them till their young ones are hatched; and when they are, they continue to sit and cherish them, so long as they require it; and during all that time the mother bird never goes in search of food for herself, but leaves all the care of that to her dear mate, who is so faithful to her that he not only seeks grains of corn to feed her, but also brings water in his beak for her to drink; he takes the utmost care that she shall not be in want of anything that is necessary, so that a dove was never known to die for want of nourishment at that time. The dove, then, does everything for her mate; she hatches and cherishes her young ones, from the desire she has to please him, by giving him a progeny; and he takes care to feed his dear dove, who has left all the care of herself to him; she thinks only of pleasing her mate, and he in return, thinks only of supporting her. Oh what an agreeable and profitable law is this, to do nothing but for God, and to leave to Him all the care of ourselves.! I do not say it only in what regards temporal things, (for I will not speak of them where there is no one but ourselves, that is understood without saying it;) but I say it in what regards spiritual things, and the advancement of our souls in perfection. Oh! do not you see that the dove thinks only of her well beloved mate, and of pleasing him, in not stirring from her eggs? And yet nothing is wanting to her, for he in reward of her confidence, takes every care of her. Oh, how happy should we be, if we did everything for our amiable Spouse, who is the Holy Spirit! for He would take care of us; and in proportion to the confi-

dence with which we reposed in His Providence, would His care extend itself over all our necessities; and we must never fear that God should fail us, for His love is infinite for the soul that reposes in Him. Oh! how happy is the dove to have so much confidence in her dear mate! That is what makes her live in peace and in marvellous tranquillity. A thousand times more happy is the soul, which, leaving the care of herself and of all she needs, to her dear and well-beloved Spouse, thinks only of hatching and bringing up her young ones, to please Him and give Him a progeny; for she enjoys even in this life a tranquillity and a peace so great that there is nothing to be compared to it, nor any repose equal to hers in this world, but only in heaven, where she will fully enjoy for ever the chaste embraces of her heavenly Spouse. But what are our eggs, which we must sit upon till they are hatched, that we may have some young ones? Our eggs are our desires, which, being well cherished and hatched, the young doves come forth, which are the effects of our desires; but, among our desires there is one which is pre-eminent above all others, and which greatly deserves to be well hatched, to please our Divine Spouse, the Holy Spirit, who chooses to be always called the Sacred Spouse of our souls, so great is His goodness and love towards us. This is the desire we brought with us on entering into religion, of embracing the religious virtues; it is one of the branches of the love of God, and one of the highest of that divine tree. But this desire ought not to extend farther than the means which are marked out for us in our Rules and Constitutions, to arrive at that perfection which we have aimed at acquiring, in obliging ourselves

to the pursuit of it; but we must hatch and cherish it all the time of our lives, in order that the desire may become a beautiful young dove, and resemble its Father, who is perfection itself; meanwhile let us restrict our attention to sitting on our eggs, that is to say, to the means prescribed for our perfection, leaving all the care of ourselves to our only and most amiable Spouse, who will not allow us to want anything that is necessary for us to please Him. It is a great pity, certainly, to see souls, of whom the number is but too great, who, aiming at perfection, imagine that every thing consists in forming a great multitude of desires, and are so eager to seek first one way, and then another of attaining it, that they are never contented nor tranquil in themselves; for as soon as they have one desire, they quickly try to form another, and they seem to be like hens which have no sooner laid an egg than they begin directly to think of laying another, leaving aside the first one without hatching it, so that it produces no chicken. The dove does not do so, she sits upon and cherishes her young ones, till they are able to fly, and to go in search of food. The hen, if she has chickens, is in a great bustle, and never leaves off clucking and making a noise; but the dove keeps herself tranquil and in repose, she does not make any noise or bustle. In the same way there are souls which cease not to cluck and bustle after their young ones, that is, after the desires they have of perfecting themselves, and never think they can find persons enough to talk to about them, and to ask for good and new methods. In short, they amuse themselves so much with talking about the perfection they want to acquire, that they forget to practise the

principal method, which is that of keeping themselves quiet, and placing all their confidence in Him who alone can give increase to what they have sown and planted. All that is good in us depends on the grace of God, in which we must place all our confidence; and yet it seems, by their eagerness to do a great deal, that they trust in their labour, and in the multiplicity of the practices they undertake, thinking they never can do enough. That is good, provided it be accompanied with peace and with loving care to do well whatever they do, and still to depend always on the grace of God, and not on their practices; I mean, to expect no fruit from their labour, without the grace of God. It appears that these souls so eager in the pursuit of their perfection, have forgotten, or do not know, what Jeremias says: "O, poor man! what doest thou, trusting in thy labour and in thy industry? Knowest thou not that it is indeed for thee to cultivate well the earth, to plough and to sow it; but that it is for God to give the increase to the plants, and to cause thee to have a good harvest, and rain favourable to thy sown lands? Thou mayest indeed water, but yet that would avail thee nothing, if God did not bless thy labour, and did not give thee a good harvest by His grace alone, and not by thy efforts. Depend, then, entirely on His divine goodness. It is true, it is our duty to cultivate well, but it is for God to make our labour be followed by good success. Holy Church sings on every feast of the holy confessors, God has honoured your labours, by making you reap the fruit of them; in order to show that of ourselves we can do nothing without the grace of God, in which we ought to put all our trust expecting nothing from our-

selves. Let us not be eager about our work, I pray, for to do it well we must apply ourselves to it carefully, but quietly and peacefully, not putting our confidence in our labour, but in God and in His grace. These anxieties that we have to advance our perfection, and to see whether we advance, are by no means agreeable to God, and serve only to satisfy self-love, which is a great busybody, and is always undertaking much, though it does but little. One good work well done with quietness of mind, is worth far more than many done with eagerness.

The dove amuses herself simply in her work to do it well, leaving all other cares to her dear mate; the soul which is truly dove-like, that is to say, which dearly loves God, applies itself simply, without hurry, to the means that are prescribed to us of perfecting ourselves, without seeking for others however perfect they may be. "My well-beloved," she says, "thinks for me, and I trust in Him; He loves me, and I am all His, in testimony of my love." Some time ago some holy nuns said to me, "My Lord, what shall we do this year? Last year we fasted three days in the week, and we took the discipline as often; what shall we do now throughout this year? We really must do something more, as well to give God thanks for the past year, as to go on still making progress in the way of God." It is well said that we must be always advancing, I answered; but we do not advance by the multitude of our pious exercises, as you think, but by the perfection with which we perform them, confiding more and more in our dear Spouse, and more and more distrusting ourselves. Last year you fasted three days in the week,

and you took the discipline three times; if you were always to double your exercises, this year the whole week would be taken up, but next year what could you do? You would have to make nine days in the week, or else to fast twice a day. Great is the folly of those who amuse themselves with desiring to be martyred in the Indies, and do not apply themselves to what they have to do, according to their condition! But those also make a great mistake, who want to eat more than they can digest. We have not enough spiritual heat to digest well all that we undertake for our perfection, and yet we will not give up our great anxiety and desire to do a great deal. To read many spiritual books, above all when they are new, to speak well about God, and all the most spiritual things, in order, we say, to excite ourselves to devotion, to hear many sermons, to hold conferences on all occasions, to communicate very often, to confess still oftener, to serve the sick, to speak well about all that passes in us, to show the desire we feel to become perfect, and as quickly as possible—are not these things very likely to perfect us, and to bring us to the end we are aiming at? Yes, provided that all is done as it has been commanded us, and always in dependance on the grace of God; that is to say, if we do not put our trust in all that, however good it may be, but in God, who alone can make us reap the fruit of all our exercises. But, my dear daughters, I entreat you to consider a little the life of those great religious, for instance, of a St. Antony, who has been honoured by God and man on account of his very great sanctity. Tell me, how did he arrive at so great a degree of sanctity and perfection? Was it by dint of reading, or by conferences and fre-

quent communions, or by the multitude of the sermons that he heard? By no means; he arrived at it by making use of the example of the holy hermits, taking the abstinence of one, the prayer of another, and thus, like an industrious bee, he went about gathering and collecting the virtues of the servants of God, to compose of them the honey of a holy edification. And St. Paul, the first hermit, did he attain to the sanctity he acquired, by the reading of good books? He had none. Was it by the communions or confessions that he made? He only made two in his life. Was it by conferences or sermons? In the desert there were none, and he saw no one except St. Antony, who went to visit him at the end of his life. Do you know what made him a saint? It was his fidelity in applying himself to that which he had been called to, and had undertaken at the beginning, and in not amusing himself with anything else. Those great saints, the religious who lived under the charge of St. Pacomius, had they books, or sermons? None. Conferences? They had some, but rarely. Did they confess often? Sometimes on great feasts. Did they hear many masses? On Sundays and festivals, on other days none. But how comes it then, that eating so little of that spiritual food which nourishes our souls for immortality, they were yet always in such good condition, that is, so strong and courageous in undertaking the acquirement of virtues, and in attaining to perfection and to the end of their endeavours; while we, who eat much, are always so thin, that is so weak and languid in the pursuit of our enterprises? It appears that we have neither courage nor vigour in the service of our Lord, except so long as we are assisted

by spiritual consolations. Now then, we must imitate these holy religious, in applying ourselves fervently and humbly to our work, that is to say, to what God requires of us in our vocation, and in thinking of nothing else, not imagining that we could find any better way of perfecting ourselves. But, you may answer me, "You say *fervently*. My God! how can I do this? for I have no fervour!" Not of the kind you mean, as to the sentiment, which God gives to whom He pleases, and which it is not in our power to acquire when we choose. I add also, *humbly*, in order that you may not have any excuse. Do not say, "I have no humility, it is not in my power to have it;" for the Holy Ghost, who is goodness itself, gives it to whoever asks Him for it; not the humility, that is the feeling of our littleness, which makes us humble ourselves so gracefully in all things; but I mean the humility which makes us know our own abjection, and which makes us love it, having recognised it to be in us; for that is true humility. Never was there so much study as now-a-days. Those great saints, Augustine, Gregory, Hilary, whose feast we are keeping to-day, and many others, did not study so much; they could not have done it, composing so many books as they did, preaching, and doing all the rest of the duties of their office; but they had so great confidence in God and in His grace, and so great a distrust of themselves, that they did not rely upon nor trust in any degree to their own industry or labour, so that they effected all their great works purely by the confidence they placed in the grace of God and in His omnipotence. "It is Thou, O Lord!" they said, "who makest us labour, and for whom we labour, it will be

Thou who wilt bless our exertions, and wilt give us a good harvest." Thus their books and their preaching, produced marvellous fruits. And we who trust to our fine words, to our eloquence, to our learning, all our labours pass away in smoke, and give no fruit but vanity. You must, then, as the conclusion of this first law that I give you, put full trust in God, and do all for Him, leaving the care of yourselves entirely to your dear Spouse, who will take charge of you in the most perfect manner; and the more true and perfect is your confidence, the more special will be His providence.

I have thought of giving you for a second law the words which the doves say in their language. "The more they take from me, the more I produce," they say. What does that mean? It means that when their young ones are a little grown, the master of the dovecote comes and takes them away, and immediately they set about hatching others; but if they are not taken away, they amuse themselves for a long time over the first, and therefore do not hatch so many. They say then; "The more they take from me, the more I produce." And to make you understand better what I mean, I give you an example: Job, that great servant of God, who was praised by the mouth of God Himself, did not let himself be overcome by any affliction that happened to him; but the more God deprived him of his little doves, the more he produced. What did he not do, while he was in his first prosperity? What good works did he not perform? He tells us himself in this way: "I was a foot to the lame," that is, I had him carried, or I put him on my ass or my camel; "I

was an eye to the blind" * by having him led; I was in short the provider of the famished, and the refuge of all the afflicted. Now see him reduced to extreme poverty. He does not complain that God had deprived him of the means he had of doing so many good works; but he says with the dove; the more they take from me, the more I produce. Not of alms, for he has not wherewith; but in this one act of submission and patience that he made, seeing himself deprived of all his possessions and of his children, he did more than he had done by all his great charities in the time of his prosperity, and rendered himself more agreeable to God by this one act of patience than by so very many good works that he had done during his life; for a more strong and generous love was required for this one act, than for all the others put together. We must then do the same in order to observe this amiable law of the doves, letting ourselves be despoiled by our Sovereign Master of our little doves; that is to say, of the means of executing our desires, when He is pleased to deprive us of them, however good they may be, without ever lamenting or complaining of Him, as if He were doing us great wrong; but we must apply ourselves to doubling, not our desires nor our exercises, but the perfection with which we do them, endeavouring in this way to gain more by a single act (as we undoubtedly shall), than we should by a hundred others done according to our choice and affection. Our Lord will not have us carry His cross, except by the foot; and He will be honoured like the great ladies, who have the train of

* Job xxix 15.

their robes carried. He will however have us carry the cross that He puts on our shoulders, which is our own. But alas! we do nothing of the kind; for when His goodness deprives us of the consolation He gave us in our exercises, we fancy that all is lost, and that He takes away from us the means of doing what we have undertaken. Just consider that soul, how well she hatches her eggs in the time of consolation, and leaves the care of herself to her dear and well-beloved Spouse. If she is in prayer, what holy desires of pleasing Him does she not form! She melts in His presence; she pours herself out to her Beloved, she leaves herself entirely in the arms of His Divine Providence. Oh! what pleasing eggs are those! all that is very good; and the little doves are not wanting, which are the effects; for what does she not do? Her works of charity are so numerous; her modesty appears before all the Sisters; she gives the greatest edification; she is admired by all who see her or who know her. "Mortifications," she says, "cost me nothing at that time; they were consolations to me; obediences were joys; I no sooner heard the first sound of the bell than I arose; I omitted no practice of virtue, and all this I did with very great peace and tranquillity. But now that I am disgusted, and that I am usually in dryness in prayer, I seem to have no courage for my amendment; I no longer have that ardour I used to experience in my exercises; in short frost and cold have passed over me." Alas! I can well believe it. See I pray, this poor soul, how she laments her misfortune: her discontent appears even in her face, her countenance is depressed and melancholy, and she goes about quite pensive and as confused as

possible. Good God! what is the matter with you? one is forced to say to her. "Oh! what is the matter with me! I am so languid, nothing can please me, everything disgusts me; I am so confounded now." But with what sort of confusion? for there are two sorts, one which leads to humility and life, the other to despair and consequently to death. "I assure you," she says, "I am so depressed that I have almost lost the courage to persevere in the pursuit of perfection. Oh what weakness! consolation is wanting, and therefore, courage. Oh! we must not let it be thus; but the more God deprives us of consolation, the more we must labour to show Him our fidelity. A single act made in dryness of spirit is of more value than many made with great sweetness; because, as I have already said in speaking of Job, it is made with a stronger love, though it is not so tender nor so agreeable. The more then they take from me, the more I produce. This is the second law which I greatly desire to see you observe.

The third law of the doves, which I present to you, is that they lament as they rejoice; they never sing but one and the same air, as well for their chants of rejoicing as for those in which they lament, that is complain and manifest their grief. See them perched upon the branches, where they lament the loss of their young ones, which the weasel or the owl has stolen from them, for when any one but the master of the dovecote takes them, they are much grieved. See them also, when their mate approaches them, and they are quite consoled: they do not change their tune, but make the same murmuring to prove their satisfaction, that they

make to show their sorrow. It is this most holy evenness of mind, my dear souls, that I wish for you; I do not say evenness of humour nor of inclination; I say evenness of mind. For I do not make, nor desire that you should make, any account of the disturbances caused by the inferior part of our soul, which gives rise to uneasiness and caprices, when the superior part does not do its duty by making itself the mistress, and does not keep a strict watch on its enemies as the Spiritual Combat says it ought to do, in order that it may be quickly aware of the troubles and assaults made upon it by the inferior part, springing from our senses, inclinations, and passions, so as to fight against it and bring it into subjection to its laws. But I say that we must keep ourselves always firm and resolute in the superior part of our spirit, and follow the virtue of which we make profession, keeping ourselves constantly the same in adversity as in prosperity, in desolation as in consolation, and lastly in dryness as in tenderness. Job, of whom we have already spoken in the second law, furnishes us also with an example on this subject; for he sang always to the same air all the canticles that he composed, which are nothing else than the history of his life. What did he say when God multiplied his possessions, gave him children, and in short sent him according to his wishes, everything that he could desire in this life? What did he say but, "Blessed be the Name of the Lord?" * It was his canticle of love, which he sang on every occasion. For see him reduced to the extremity of affliction; what does he do? He

* Job i. 21.

sings his canticle of lamentation to the same air that he sang in rejoicing. "We have received," said he, "good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil? The Lord had given me children and possessions; the Lord has taken them away from me: blessed be His holy Name; blessed be the Name of the Lord for ever." Oh! this holy soul was indeed a chaste and loving dove, greatly beloved by her dear Spouse! May we do thus, my dear daughters, so that on all occasions we may take good and evil, consolations and afflictions, from the hand of the Lord, never singing anything but the same most amiable canticle: "Blessed be the Name of the Lord," always to the tune of continual equality. For if we attain to this good fortune, we shall live with great peace under all circumstances. But let us not do like those who weep when consolation fails, and do nothing but sing when it returns; in which they resemble apes and monkeys, which are always sad and angry in rainy and gloomy weather, and cease not to play and jump about when it is fine.

These are then the three laws that I give you, which however being laws solely of love, oblige only through love. The love then that we bear our Lord, will urge us to observe and keep them; in order that we may be able to say, in imitation of the beautiful dove of the sovereign and holy Spouse: "My beloved to me, and I to Him," * doing nothing but to please Him. "He always has His heart turned towards me by providence, as mine is turned towards Him by confidence."

all for our Beloved in this life, He will

take care to provide us with His eternal glory, in reward of our confidence: and there we shall see the happiness of those who, giving up the superfluous and uneasy care that we usually take about ourselves and our perfection, shall have devoted themselves simply to their work, abandoning themselves without reserve to the Divine Goodness, for which alone they will have laboured; their labours will at length be followed by a peace and a repose which cannot be explained; for they will repose for ever on the bosom of their Beloved.

Great also will be the happiness of those who have observed the second law; for having let themselves be deprived by the Master, who is our Lord, of all their young doves, and not having been at all angry or vexed, but having had the courage to say, "The more they take from me, the more I produce;" remaining submissive to the good pleasure of Him who has despoiled them, they will all the more heartily sing in heaven the most amiable canticle, * "Blessed be the Name of the Lord," in the midst of eternal consolations, as they have more heartily sung it amidst the desolations, languors, and disgusts of this mortal and transitory life, during which we must try carefully to preserve a continual and most amiable evenness of mind. Amen.

* "Dieu soit béni."

CONFERENCE VIII.

DISAPPROPRIATION.

On disappropriation and despoiling ourselves* of all things.

The little affections of mine and thine are remains of the world, where nothing else is so precious; for it is the supreme happiness of the world to have many things belonging to us, of which we can say, "This is mine." Now, what makes us attached to that which is our own, is the great esteem we have for ourselves; for we think ourselves so excellent that the moment a thing belongs to us, we esteem it the more, and the little esteem we have for others makes us dislike what they have made use of. But if we were really humble and stripped of ourselves, if we held ourselves as nothing before God, we should make no account of what belonged to us, and we should think ourselves exceedingly honoured by having to use what had served for others. But we must in this, as in everything else, distinguish between inclinations and affections, for when these things are only inclinations and not affections, we must not trouble ourselves about them, because bad inclinations do not depend upon ourselves, though bad affections do. If, then, it happens, that in changing the habit of a sister she receives a worse one, the inferior

* This is a translation of the French word "dépouillement," one of the many expressions for spiritual poverty which it is difficult to render into our language.

part is a little disturbed by it, that is not sin, provided that with her reason she willingly accepts it for the love of God; and so with all the other feelings which arise Now, these emotions rise in us, because we have not put all our wills in common, which yet is a thing that ought to be done on entering religion; for each sister ought to leave her own will outside the door, so as to have no will but God's will. Blessed is she who has no other will but that of the community, and who takes every day what she wants out of the common purse. It is thus that we must understand those sacred words of our Lord: "Be not solicitous for the morrow."* They refer not so much to what regards food and clothing, as to spiritual exercises; for, if any one were to ask you, what will you do tomorrow? you would answer, "I do not know; today I shall do such a thing which is commanded me, tomorrow I know not what I shall do, because I know not what will be commanded me." Whoever should do thus, would never have any grief or uneasiness, for where there is true indifference there can be no displeasure nor sadness.

If a sister wished to have anything of her own, we should be obliged to go out of the house to give it her, for within, such a thing is not spoken of. Now we must wish for renunciation not only in general, but in particular, for there is nothing so easy as to say by wholesale, we must renounce ourselves, we must give up our own will; but when we come to the practice of it, there lies the difficulty. This is why we must make considerations, both on our condition, and on all those

* St. Matthew, vi. 34.

things which depend upon it in detail; then in particular, renounce sometimes one and sometimes another of our own wishes, till we are entirely divested of them; and this true spoliation of self is made by three degrees. The first is the affection of spoliation, which is created in us by the consideration of its beauty. The second degree is the resolution which follows the affection; for we easily resolve on a good action that we love. The third is the practice, which is the most difficult. The possessions of which we must divest ourselves, are of three sorts; exterior goods, those of the body, and those of the soul. Exterior goods are all those things which we have left in the world; houses, possessions, relations, friends, and such things. In order to divest ourselves of them, we must renounce them into the hands of our Lord, and then ask for the affections that He wills we should have for them; for we must not remain without affections, nor let them be equal and indifferent; we must love each in the proper degree. Charity places the affections in their order. The second goods are those of the body; beauty, health, and similar things, which we must renounce; and then we must go no more to the looking-glass to see if we are beautiful, nor care for health any more than for illness, at least as to the superior part; for human nature is always sensitive, and sometimes complains, especially when one is not very perfect. We ought then to remain equally contented in illness and in health, and take remedies and food as they are offered us; I mean always with our reason; for as to our inclinations, I do not amuse myself with them. The goods of the heart are the consolations and sweetnesses which are met with in the

spiritual life; these are excellent. "And why," you will say, "should we renounce them?" We must do so, however, and resign them into the hands of our Lord to dispose of them as He pleases, and we must serve Him without them as well as with them. There is another sort of goods, which are neither interior nor exterior, neither of the body nor of the heart; these are imaginary goods, which depend on the opinion of others; they are called honour, esteem, reputation. Now we must be entirely stripped of these, and desire no other honour but the honour of the congregation, which is to seek in everything the glory of God; nor any other esteem or reputation but that of the community, which is to give edification in all things. All these spoliations and renouncements of the above-mentioned things should be made, not out of contempt, but from abnegation, for the sole and pure love of God. It must here be remarked that the satisfaction we feel in meeting persons whom we love, and the signs of affection we show them on seeing them, are not contrary to this virtue of spoliation, provided they are not out of order, and that our heart does not run after them in their absence; for how could our feelings not be moved when the objects are present? It is as if one should say to a person who meets a lion or a bear, "Do not be afraid." That is not in our power. So, in meeting those whom we love, we cannot help being moved by joy and satisfaction; therefore, it is not contrary to virtue. I say still farther, if I wish to see a person for some end that is useful, and would tend to the glory of God; if his intention of coming is frustrated, and I feel a little annoyed at it, and even am a little

eager to remove the obstacles which detain him, I do nothing contrary to the virtue of spoliation, provided that I do not give way to uneasiness. So you see that virtue is not so terrible a thing as it is imagined. This is a mistake that many make; they invent chimeras in their minds, and fancy that the road to heaven is strangely difficult; in which they are very wrong and much mistaken. For David said to our Lord, that His law was very sweet; and in proportion as the wicked proclaimed it hard and difficult, that good king declared it to be sweeter than honey. We ought to say the same of our vocation, esteeming it not only good and beautiful, but also sweet, gentle, and loveable. If we do so, we shall have a great love for observing all that depends upon it.

It is true, my dear sisters, that we can never attain to perfection, while we have an affection for any imperfection, however small it may be, even were it only the having a useless thought. You cannot imagine how much harm that does to a soul, for when you allow your mind to dwell on a useless thought, it will soon think of things that are pernicious. We must then cut short the evil as soon as we perceive it, however little it may be. We must also examine carefully whether it be true, as it sometimes seems to us, that our affections are not engaged: for example, if when you are praised, you say some word that may enhance the praise bestowed upon you, or else if you seek it by artful words, saying that you no longer have the memory or quickness you used to have to enable you to speak well. Ah! any one can see that you want to be told that you still speak extremely well.

Seek, then, in the depths of your conscience, whether you can find there any affection for vanity. You may also easily ascertain if you are attached to anything, when you are prevented from doing what you have proposed: for if you have no affection for it, you will be as much at rest in not doing it, as if you had done it; and on the contrary, if you are disturbed, it is a sign that you had placed your affection on it. Now, our affections are so precious (since they ought all to be employed in loving God), that we must take great care not to place them on useless things; and one fault, however small it may be, committed with affection, is more contrary to perfection, than a hundred others committed by surprise and without affection.

You ask how we should love creatures. I answer you briefly that there are certain loves which seem in the eyes of creatures extremely great and perfect, and yet before God will prove to be little and of no value; because these friendships are not founded on true charity, which is God, but only on certain natural alliances and inclinations, and on motives that are humanly speaking praiseworthy and agreeable. On the contrary, there are others which appear extremely little and empty in the eyes of the world, and before God will be found full and very excellent; because they are formed in God, and for God, without mixture of our own interest. Now the acts of charity that are done towards those whom we love in this manner, are a thousand times more perfect, inasmuch as they all tend purely to God; but the services and other assistances that we afford to those whom we love from inclination are of much less merit, on account of the great com-

placency and satisfaction that we feel in them, and because we usually do them rather from this feeling than from the love of God. There is also another reason which renders these first friendships of which we have spoken, less than the second ones: it is that they are not so lasting; because the cause of them being frail, they are cooled and changed as soon as any hindrance occurs; which does not happen to those that are founded in God, because the cause is solid and permanent.

On this subject St. Catherine of Siena makes a pretty comparison. If you take a glass, she says, and fill it at a fountain, and drink from the glass without taking it out of the fountain, the glass will not be emptied, though you may drink as much as you please; but if you take it out of the fountain, the glass will be emptied. So it is with friendships; when they are not taken out of their source, they are never exhausted. Even the caresses and signs of friendship that we show against our own inclination to those persons to whom we have an aversion, are better and more pleasing to God, than those that are the result of a sensible affection. And this must not be called duplicity or dissimulation; for if I have a contrary feeling, it is only in the inferior part of my nature, and the acts that I do are done by the force of reason, which is the principal part of my soul: so that if those whom I caress knew that I do it because I have an aversion to them, they ought not to be offended, but to esteem and value them more than if they arose from sensible affection: for aversions are natural, and are not evil in themselves, if we do not follow them; on the contrary, they give us the means

of practising a thousand kinds of excellent virtues, and our Lord Himself is better pleased with us when we go with extreme repugnance to kiss His feet, than if we went with a great deal of sweetness. Therefore, those who have nothing amiable about them, are very happy, for they may be assured that the love that is borne them is excellent, since it is all in God. We often think we love persons for God, when we love them for ourselves; we make use of this pretext, and say it is for that we love them; but in fact we love them for the consolation we derive from it. For is there not more sweetness in seeing a person come to you full of good feelings, who follows your advice exceedingly well, and who goes on faithfully and tranquilly in the way you have marked out for her, than in seeing another who is quite uneasy, embarrassed, and weak in doing well, and to whom we must say the same thing a thousand times? No doubt you will have more sweetness. Then it is not for God that you love her: for this last person belongs as much to God as the first, and you ought to love her more, for she gives you more to do for God. It is true that where there is more of God, that is, more of virtue, which is a participation of the Divine qualities, we ought to feel more affection; as for example, if there are souls more perfect than that of your superioress, you ought to love them more for that reason; nevertheless we ought to love our superiors much more, because they are our fathers and directors.

As to what you ask me, whether we should be very glad that one sister should practise virtue at the expense of another, I say that we should love the good in our

neighbour as in ourselves, and especially in religion, where all ought to be entirely in common, and we should not be sorry if a sister practices any virtue at our expense. For example, I come to a door with one younger than myself, and I retire to let her pass; as I practise this humility, so she ought with sweetness to practise simplicity, and to try to be beforehand with me another time. In like manner, if I give her a seat, or retire from my place, she should be pleased that I gain this little advantage, and thus she will share in it; as if she said, since I could not do this act of virtue, I am very glad that this sister has done it; and we must not only not be annoyed, but we must be disposed to contribute to this end all that we can, even to our life, if it were required. For provided that God is glorified, we must not care by whom; so that if the occasion presented itself of doing some good work, and that our Lord asked us who we would rather should do it, we should answer: Lord, whoever will do it for Thy greatest glory. Having no choice, we ought to desire to do it, for charity begins with oneself; but not being able to do it, we must rejoice, be pleased, and exceedingly glad that another does it; and thus we shall have everything in common. We must say the same with regard to temporal things; for provided the house be supplied, we should not care whether it is by means of ourselves or of others. If we have any little contrary wishes, it is a sign that something still remains of mine and thine.

You ask, lastly, if we can know whether we are advancing to perfection or not. I answer that we shall never know our own perfection: for it is with us as

with those who navigate the seas, they do not know whether they advance; but the pilot knows, who has the means of measuring their progress. Thus we cannot judge of our own advancement, as we can of that of others; for when we do a good action, we dare not feel sure that we have done it perfectly, since humility forbids us. But though we may be able to judge of the virtues of others, yet we must never determine that one person is better than another; because appearances are deceitful, and one who appears very virtuous outwardly and in the eyes of creatures, may before God be less so than another who appears much more imperfect. I wish you, above all perfections, to have that of humility, which is not only charitable, but sweet and tractable. For charity is an ascending humility, and humility is a descending charity. I love you better when you have more humility and less of other perfections, than when you have more of other perfections and less humility.

CONFERENCE IX.

MODESTY.

Which treats of modesty, of the manner of receiving reproofs, and of the means of so establishing ourselves in God, that nothing can turn us from Him.

You ask what true modesty is. I will tell you that there are four virtues which all bear the name of modesty. The first which bears it especially above the others, is the propriety of our outward conduct, and to this virtue are opposed two vices; the one is dissipation in our gestures and manners, that is to say, levity; the other, which is no less contrary to it, is affectation. The second which bears the name of modesty, is the interior propriety of our understanding and of our will; this also has two opposite vices, which are, curiosity of intellect, the multitude of desires to know and understand everything, and instability in our undertakings, passing from one practice to another, without fixing ourselves on anything; the other vice is a certain stupidity and indolence of mind, which does not choose to know or learn the things necessary for our perfection; a fault no less dangerous than the other. The third sort of modesty consists in our conversation and in our words, that is to say, in our way of speaking and conversing with our neighbour, avoiding the two imperfections that are opposed to it, namely, rudeness and talkativeness; rudeness, which prevents us from contributing towards the keeping up of civil intercourse; talkative-

ness, which makes us speak so much, that we leave no time for others to speak in their turn. The fourth is cleanliness and propriety in our clothes; and the two contrary vices are dirt and superfluity.

These are the four sorts of modesty. The first is extremely commendable for several reasons, and chiefly because it controls us much. There is no virtue for which such particular attention is required; and its great value consists in its keeping us in subjection. For all that brings us into subjection for God is of great merit and wonderfully pleasing to God. The second reason is that it controls us not only for a time, but always and in all places, as well alone as in company, and at all times, yes, even in sleep. A great saint wrote to one of his disciples, saying that he should lie down to sleep modestly in the presence of God, as he would do whom our Lord, being still in life, should command to lie down and sleep in His presence; and although, said he, thou dost not see Him, and dost not hear the command He gives thee, do not fail to do it just the same as if thou didst see Him, because, in fact, He is present and watches over thee while thou sleepest. O my God! how modestly and devoutly we should lie down to sleep, if we saw Thee! No doubt we should cross our arms on our breasts with great devotion. Modesty, then, controls us always and during all the time of our life, because the angels are always present to us, and God Himself, before whose eyes we keep ourselves in modesty. This virtue is also very commendable on account of the edification of our neighbour; and I assure you that mere exterior modesty has converted many; as it happened to St. Francis, who

once passed through a town with so great modesty of demeanour, that without his saying a single word, a great number of young people, attracted by this example alone, followed him to be instructed by him. Modesty is a silent preaching; it is a virtue that St. Paul very particularly recommends to the Philippians, saying to them; "Let your modesty be known to all men."* And what he says to his disciple St. Timothy, that the bishop must be adorned, means that he should be adorned with modesty, and not with rich vestments; in order that by his modest bearing, he may give confidence to every one to accost him, avoiding equally reserve and levity; so that while giving liberty to the worldly to approach him, they may not think that he is worldly like themselves.

Now the virtue of modesty observes three things; the time, the place, and the person. For tell me, if any one would not laugh at recreation, except as we laugh at other times, would not he be troublesome? There are gestures and manners which would be immodest at other times, but are not at all so at that time; in like manner, if any one would laugh and relax his mind when he is seriously occupied, as may very reasonably be done at recreation, would he not be esteemed light and immodest? We must also observe the place, the persons, and the conversations in which we are, but most particularly the quality of the person. The modesty of a woman of the world is different from that of a nun. A young woman who, being in the world, should keep her eyes cast down like our sisters, would not be

* iv. 5.

esteemed; any more than our sisters would, if they did not keep them more cast down than people in the world. What is modesty in one man will be immodesty in another, on account of his position. Gravity, which is extremely becoming to an aged person, would be affected in a younger one, to whom a more subdued and humble modesty would be becoming. I must tell you something I read a few days ago, as it concerns the discourse we are making upon modesty. The great saint Arsenius, (who was chosen by the Pope, St. Damasus, to instruct and bring up Arcadius, son of the Emperor Theodosius, who was to succeed him in the government of the empire,) after having been held in honour for several years at court, and as much favoured by the Emperor as any man in the world, grew weary at length of all these vanities, though he lived no less honourably than like a Christian at court, and resolved to retire into the desert with the holy hermits who lived there, and he executed his design very courageously. The fathers, who had heard the renown of the virtue of this great saint, were greatly rejoiced and consoled to have him in their company. He associated particularly with two religious, one of whom was named Pastor, and made great friendship with them. Now, one day, when all the fathers were assembled to hold a spiritual conference, (for this has at all times been a practice among spiritual people,) one of the fathers informed the superior that Arsenius commonly committed an immodesty, in crossing one leg over the other. "It is true," answered the father, "I have remarked it too, but he is a good man who has lived long in the world; he has brought this habit from the court; what would they do there?" He

excused him, for he was reluctant to grieve him by reproving him for so slight a thing in which there was no sin; but still he wished that he should be cured of it, for there was nothing else that could be found fault with. Then Pastor the religious said, "O my father, be not uneasy, there need be no difficulty in telling him, for he will be very glad of it; and for that purpose, if you please, tomorrow at the hour of assembly, I will put myself in the same position as he does, and you will correct me for it before every one, and thus he will perceive that it should not be done." The father then giving the reproof to Pastor, the good Arsenius prostrated himself at the feet of the father, humbly asking pardon, and saying that though they might not have remarked it, he had nevertheless always committed that fault, that it was his usual attitude at court, and that he asked for a penance for it. This was not given him, but he was never seen again in that posture. In this story I find several things well worthy of consideration; first, the prudence of the superior in fearing to grieve the good Arsenius by a correction of so little importance, and yet seeking the means of having him corrected; by which he shows plainly that they were all very exact in the least thing that concerned modesty. Then I remark the goodness of Arsenius in acknowledging himself to be in fault, and his fidelity in correcting himself of so trifling a fault, that it was not even an immodesty at court, though it was amongst these fathers. I see also that we should not be astonished if we have still some old habit of the world, since Arsenius had that one, after having lived long in the desert in the company of the fathers; we cannot so

quickly get rid of all our imperfections. We must never be dismayed to see many in ourselves, provided we have the will to fight against them. And observe, that it is not a rash judgment to think that the superior corrects another for a fault that you have committed as well as he, in order that without being reproved, you may amend it yourself; but you must humble yourself profoundly, seeing that he perceives you to be weak, and well knows that you would feel the correction too much if he gave it to you. We must also dearly love this abjection, and humble ourselves, as did Arsenius, confessing that we are guilty of the same fault, provided we always humble ourselves in the spirit of sweetness and tranquillity.

I see clearly that you desire that I should speak also of the other virtues of modesty. I will tell you, then, that the second, which is interior, produces the same effects in the soul, as the one we have been speaking of does in the body. The latter composes the movements, gestures, and positions of the body, avoiding the two extremes, which are those two contrary vices, levity or dissipation, and too great affectation of manner. In the same way interior modesty keeps the powers of our soul in tranquillity and modesty, avoiding, as I have said, curiosity of the understanding over which it chiefly exercises its care, retrenching also in our will the multitude of desires, making it apply itself holily to the one only thing which Mary chose, and which will not be taken away from her, that is, the wish to please God. Martha represents very well the immodesty of the will; for she is busy, and sets all the servants of the house to work, she goes here and there without stopping, so

eager is she to entertain our Lord well, and she thinks there can never be dishes enough prepared to make a feast for Him. So the will when it is not checked by modesty, passes from one subject to another, to excite itself to love of God and to desire many ways of serving Him: and yet so many things are not necessary; it is better to attach ourselves to God like Magdalen, remaining at His feet, and asking Him to give us His love, than to think how and by what means we can acquire it. This modesty keeps the will confined to the practice of the means of its advancement in the love of God, according to our vocation. I have said that this virtue is chiefly occupied in bringing the understanding into subjection; and this because the curiosity we naturally have is very dangerous, and prevents us from ever knowing one thing perfectly, because we do not take time enough to learn it well. We also shun the other extreme, the opposite vice of stupidity and negligence of mind, which will not learn what is necessary. Now this subjection of the understanding is of very great importance to our perfection; for while the will leans towards one thing, if the understanding shows it the beauty of another, it turns it away from the first. Bees have no rest, while they have no queen; they fly about in the air without ceasing, and are scattered and lost, having scarcely any repose even in their hive: but as soon as their queen is born, they all keep collected round her, and do not go out except to gather honey, and to obey the command of their queen. In the same way our understanding and will, our passions, and the faculties of our souls, like spiritual bees, have no repose till they have a king, that is to say, till they

have chosen our Lord for their king; our senses cease not to wander about curiously, and to draw our interior faculties after them, to dissipate themselves first on one subject, then on another; thus there is nothing but continual fatigue and uneasiness, which makes us lose the peace and tranquillity of mind which is necessary for us; and this is what is caused by immodesty of understanding and of will. But as soon as our souls have chosen our Lord for their only king and sovereign, these powers repose like chaste mystical little bees, ranging themselves round Him, and never go out of their hive, except for the gathering of the acts of charity, which that holy King commands them to practise towards their neighbour, and immediately after return to that most amiable modesty and holy repose, to arrange and enjoy the honey of the holy and loving conceptions and affections which they derive from His sacred presence. And thus they avoid the two extremes above mentioned, retrenching on the one hand curiosity of the intellect, by a simple attention to God; and on the other, guarding against stupidity and negligence of spirit, by the exercises of charity they practise towards their neighbour, when required. But here is another example on this subject. One day a religious asked the great St. Thomas, what he should do to become very learned. "Read only one book," he answered. I was reading lately the rule that St. Augustine made for nuns, in which he expressly says, that the sisters are never to read any books but those which are given them by the superioress; and afterwards he gave the same command to his monks, so well did he know the harm that is done by curiosity to

know anything beyond what is necessary for serving God better, which is certainly very little. For if you walk in simplicity in the observance of your rules, you will serve God perfectly, without dissipation or desire to know any other things. Knowledge is not necessary for serving God, so says St. Bonaventure; for a simple woman is as capable of loving God, as the most learned man in the world. Little science and much practice are required for what regards perfection. I remember speaking to two religious of well reformed Orders, on the danger there is in being curious to know so many ways of becoming perfect; one of whom by dint of reading the works of the blessed St. Teresa, learnt so well to speak like her, that she seemed to be a little Mother Teresa; and she believed it, imagining so vividly all that the Mother St. Teresa did during her life, that she fancied she did the same, even so far as having extasies or suspensions of the faculties, as she read that the Saint had, and she spoke of them very well. There are others, who by dint of thinking of the life of St. Catherine of Siena or of Genoa, fancy themselves also to be, by imitation, St. Catherines. These souls are at least contented with the imagination that they are saints, though their satisfaction is vain. But the other nun whom I said I knew, was of a very different character, inasmuch as she never felt any satisfaction, because of her avidity in seeking and desiring the ways and means of perfecting herself; and though she was labouring for that end, yet it always seemed to her that there was some other method of attaining it than the one that she was taught. One of these persons lived contented in her imaginary holiness, and neither sought

nor desired anything else; while the other lived discontented, because her perfection was hidden from her, and therefore she was always desiring something else. Interior modesty keeps the soul between these two states, desiring and knowing in moderation what is necessary, and nothing more. For the rest, we should observe that the exterior modesty of which we have spoken contributes much towards interior modesty, and the acquirement of peace and tranquillity of soul. We see the proof of this in all the holy Fathers, who have devoted themselves greatly to prayer; for they have all judged that the most modest posture helped much towards it, such as kneeling with the hands joined, or the arms in the form of a cross.

The third sort of modesty belongs to our words and manner of conversing. There are words which would be immodest at any other time than that of recreation, when we justly and with good reason relax our mind a little; and whoever would not at that time speak, or let others speak, except of high and solemn things, would commit an immodesty; for have we not said that modesty has regard to times, places, and persons? On this subject I was reading the other day that St. Pacomius, when he first entered the desert to lead a monastic life, had great temptations, and the evil spirits often appeared to him in various ways. The writer of his life says that one day as he was going into the forests to cut wood, there came a great troop of these infernal spirits to frighten him, and ranged themselves like soldiers on guard, all well armed, and cried out to each other, "Make way for the holy man!" St. Pacomius, who clearly perceived that these were tricks

of the evil spirit, began to smile, saying, "You are laughing at me; but I shall be one, if God pleases." Then the devil, seeing that he had not been able to deceive him nor to throw him into sadness, thought to take him in by means of joy, since he had laughed at his first ambuscade. He went then and tied a great quantity of strong ropes to a leaf of a tree, and several demons took hold of these ropes, as if to pull them with great violence, crying out and labouring as if it were very difficult. The good Saint lifting up his eyes, and seeing this folly, represented to himself our Lord crucified on the tree of the cross. They, seeing that the Saint thought only of the fruit of the tree, and not of the leaf, went away quite confused and ashamed. There is a time to laugh, and a time not to laugh; and also a time to speak and to be silent; as this glorious Saint showed us in these temptations. This modesty composes our manner of speaking, that it may be agreeable, neither too loud nor too low, neither too slow nor too abrupt, keeping within the limits of a holy moderation; letting others speak when they speak, without interrupting them, for that would be talkativeness; speaking however, in our turn, to avoid awkwardness and forwardness, which would be contrary to good manners. We also often find occasions when it is necessary to say a great deal silently, by modesty, equanimity, patience, and tranquillity.

The fourth virtue, named modesty, belongs to our clothes and the manner of dressing. Of this we need say nothing more than that we must avoid dirt and untidiness in our manner of dressing; as likewise the other extreme, that is vanity, which is too great care of

our dress, with an affected curiosity to be well dressed. But cleanliness has been much recommended by St. Bernard, as being a great indication of the purity and cleanness of the soul. There is one thing which seems to contradict us on this point in the life of St. Hilarion; for one day speaking to some gentleman who had gone to see him, he said to him that nobody would look for cleanliness in a hair shirt; meaning that we should not seek for neatness in our bodies, which are nothing but foul carcases and full of corruption. But that was rather admirable in that great Saint than imitable. We must not be too delicate, neither must we be dirty. The reason why that Saint spoke thus, was, if I am not mistaken, because he was speaking to courtiers, who he saw leant so much to the side of delicacy that he was obliged to speak to them a little more severely; as those who want to straighten a young shrub, not only bend it as far as they wish it to remain, but make it lean over to the other side, lest it should return to its former bent. That is what I had to say concerning modesty.

You desire, in the second place, to know how to receive correction well, without its leaving uneasiness, or dryness of heart. To prevent any feeling of anger being stirred in us, or the colour rising to our cheeks, that can never be done. Happy shall we be if we can attain to this perfection a quarter of an hour before we die. But to keep the dryness of spirit, so that after the feeling has passed away, we cannot speak with as much confidence, sweetness, and tranquillity as before, oh! we must take great care not to do that. You send the feeling far away, you say; but it nevertheless

remains. I assure you, my dear daughter, you send it away perhaps as the citizens of a town where there has been a sedition during the night, drive away the seditious and the enemies, but do not turn them out of the town; so that they hide themselves from street to street till day comes, when they attack the inhabitants, and at last remain the masters. You reject the feeling you have against the correction you receive, but not so strongly and carefully but that at least some portion of it can hide itself in some little corner of your heart. You do not wish to have the feeling; but then you will not submit your judgment, which makes you think that the correction was ill-timed, or that it was given from passion, or such like. Who does not see that this rebel will fall upon you, and overwhelm you with all sorts of confusion, if you do not instantly drive him far away? But what must be done at such a time? We must cling close to our Lord, and speak to Him of something else. But your feeling does not subside, and it suggests that you should examine into the wrong that is done you. O God! it is not the time to subdue your judgment, to make it believe and confess that the correction is good, and was rightly given; oh no! that must be after your soul is pacified and tranquillized. For during the disturbance we must neither say nor do anything but remain firm and resolved not to consent to our passion, whatever reason we might have for doing so; for reasons would never be wanting to us at such a time, they would present themselves in crowds; but we must not listen to one of them, however good they may seem; but keep as I have said, close to God, turning ourselves away from them

after we have humbled and submitted ourselves before His Majesty, and speaking to Him of other things. But observe these words, which I take great pleasure in saying, on account of their utility. Humble yourselves with a sweet and peaceful humility, and not with a humility that is cross and disturbed; for it is our misfortune that we bring before God acts of a vexed and dejected humility, and by these means we do not quiet our minds, and the acts are fruitless. But if, on the contrary, we made these acts before the Divine Goodness with a sweet confidence, we should come from them quite peaceful and tranquil, and should easily disavow afterwards all the reasons, often and for the most part unreasonable, which our own judgment and our self-love suggest to us, and we should go and speak to those who have corrected or contradicted us, with as much facility as before. You say you can very well overcome yourself to speak to them, but if they do not speak to you as you desire, that redoubles the temptation. All that proceeds from the same evil of which we have spoken. What should it signify to you whether you are spoken to in one manner or another, provided you do your duty?

Taking everything into account, there is nobody who is not averse to correction. St. Pacomius, after having lived in the deserts fourteen or fifteen years in great perfection, had a revelation from God, that he would gain a great quantity of souls, and that many would come into the deserts to place themselves under his guidance. He had already some religious with him; and the first whom he had received was his elder brother, named John. St. Pacomius then began to enlarge his

monastery, and to make a great quantity of cells. His brother John, either from ignorance of his design, or from his zeal for poverty, gave him one day a great reproof, asking him if building so large a convent was the way he meant to imitate our Lord, who had not where to lay His head while He was in this life, and several such remarks. St. Pacomius, although he was so holy, felt this correction so strongly that he turned away, in order, if I mistake not, that his countenance might not betray his vexation. Then he went instantly and threw himself on his knees before God, asking pardon for his fault, and complaining that after having lived so long in the desert, he was not yet mortified, as he said. And he made so humble and so fervent a prayer, that he obtained the grace of never again being subject to impatience. It happened even to St. Francis, towards the latter end of his life, after so many extasies and loving unions with God, after having done so much for His glory, and having overcome himself in so many ways, that as he was one day planting cabbages in the garden, a brother seeing that he did not plant them well, reproved him for it; and the saint was moved with so strong an impulse of anger at being reproved, that he half uttered an insulting word against the brother who had corrected him. He opened his mouth to pronounce it, but checked himself, and taking some of the manure that he was digging in with the cabbages, he said, "Ah! wicked tongue, I will teach thee to insult thy brother;" and directly threw himself on both knees, entreating the brother to pardon him. Now, I ask you, what reason is there that we should be astonished at seeing ourselves quick to anger, and offended

when we are reproved or contradicted? We must take example by these saints, who immediately conquered themselves, the one having recourse to prayer, and the other humbly asking pardon of his brother; neither the one nor the other did anything to favour their feeling, but corrected themselves and gained profit by it. You tell me that you willingly accept the correction, that you approve of it, and find it just and reasonable; but that it gives you a certain feeling of confusion with regard to the superioress, because you have displeased her, or caused her displeasure; and that takes away your confidence in approaching her, although you love the abjection which the fault brings upon you. That happens, my daughter, at the instigation of self-love. Perhaps, you are not aware that there is within us a certain monastery, of which self-love is the superior; and withal it imposes penances, and this uneasiness is the penance it imposes for the fault you committed in having displeased the superioress; because she will perhaps not esteem you so highly as she would have done if you had not done amiss. This is enough to say to those who receive the correction; I must say a word also to those who administer it. They must use great discretion in choosing the best time and season for doing it under proper circumstances; and besides that, they must never be astonished or offended at seeing that those who receive it are annoyed; for it is always a very hard thing for any one to receive correction.

You ask, in the third place, how you can accomplish the fixing your mind straight on God, without looking to right or left? My dear daughter, your question is

very agreeable to me, inasmuch as it carries its answer with it. You must do what you say, go to God without looking to the right or to the left. That is not what you ask, I see plainly; but how you can so fix your mind on God, that nothing may be able to detach or withdraw it from Him. Two things are necessary for this, to die and to be saved. For after that there will never be any separation, and your spirit will be indissolubly attached and united to its God. You say that again is not what you ask; but what you can do to prevent the smallest fly from withdrawing your mind from God, as it now does; you mean to say the smallest distraction. Pardon me, my daughter; the least fly of a distraction does not withdraw your mind from God, as you say, for nothing withdraws us from God except sin; and the resolution we have made in the morning of keeping our spirit united to God, and attentive to His presence, makes us remain in it always, even while we sleep; since we do it in the name of God, and according to His most holy will. It even seems that His Divine Goodness says to us; "Sleep and be at rest, and meanwhile I will keep my eyes upon you to guard and defend you from the roaring lion, which is always going about seeking to devour you." See then, whether we have not good reason to lie down to sleep modestly, as we have said. The way to do well all that we do, is to be very attentive to the presence of God; for none of us would offend Him, if we felt that He sees us. Even venial sins are not capable of turning us away from the path that leads to God; they certainly delay us a little on our way, but they do not turn us from it, and still less do mere distractions; and this I have said in the

"Introduction." With regard to prayer, it is not the less useful, nor the less agreeable to God, for having many distractions; it will perhaps be more useful than if we had many consolations, because there is more labour in it; provided, however, that we are faithful in withdrawing our spirit from these distractions, and do not let ourselves dwell upon them voluntarily. It is the same with the difficulty we find all day in keeping our mind on God and heavenly things; provided we take care to withdraw our mind and prevent it from running after these flies and butterflies, as a mother does with her child. She sees that this poor little one is bent upon running after the butterflies, thinking to catch them, and she draws him back directly and holds him by the arm, saying, "My child, you will overheat yourself by running after these butterflies in the sun, you had better stay by me." The poor child stays till he sees another, which he would be as ready as before to run after, if his mother did not hold him back. And what can we do in this case, but have patience, and not grow weary of our labour, since we go through it for the love of God? But if I am not mistaken, when we say that we cannot find God, and that He seems to be so far from us, we mean that we have no sensible perception of His presence. I remark that many persons make no difference between God and the feeling of God; between faith and the feeling of faith, which is a very great mistake. They fancy that when they do not feel God, they are not in His presence, and that shows ignorance; for a person who goes to suffer martyrdom for God, and yet at the time does not think of God but of his pains, though he may not have the sentiment of faith, does not lose the

merit of his first resolution, but makes an act of great love. There is a great difference between having the presence of God, (I mean being in His presence), and having the feeling of His presence. God alone can give us this grace, for it is not possible for me to give you the means of acquiring this feeling. You ask what you must do to keep yourselves always in great respect before God, as being very unworthy of that grace? There is no other means of doing it, but what you say. Consider that He is our God, and that we are His weak creatures, unworthy of that honour, as did St. Francis, who passed a whole night interrogating God in these terms: "Who art Thou? and who am I?"

Lastly, if you ask me, "What should I do to acquire the love of God?" I answer you, by wishing to love Him, and that instead of applying yourselves to thinking and asking how you can unite your mind to God, you should put yourselves in the practice of it by a continual application of your mind to God; and I assure you that you will arrive much sooner at your end by that means than by any other way. For in proportion as we dissipate ourselves, we are less recollected, and therefore less capable of uniting and joining ourselves with the Divine Majesty, which wishes to have all without reserve. There are certain souls so occupied in thinking how they shall act, that they have no time to act; and, nevertheless, in what regards our perfection, which consists in the union of our soul with the Divine Goodness, it is only a question of knowing little and doing much. It seems to me that those who are asked the way to heaven, have good reason to answer like those who say,

that in order to go to such a place, you must go on putting one foot before the other, and that by this means you will reach the place you desire. Go on always, one says to these souls desirous of perfection; go on in the way of your vocation, in simplicity, occupying yourselves more in doing than in desiring, for that is the shortest road. But here is a stratagem which you must allow me to disclose to you, without your being offended. It is that you would wish me to teach you a ready made way of perfection, and that you need only put it on as you would your dress, and thus find yourselves perfect without any trouble; that I should give you perfection ready made; for to do what I say you must do, is not agreeable to nature, and is not what we should like. Oh! to be sure, if that were in my power, I should be the most perfect man in the world; for if I could give perfection to others without its being necessary to do anything, I assure you I should in the first place take it for myself. You seem to think that perfection is an art; that if one could find out the secret of it, one might acquire it at once without trouble. We are certainly mistaken; for there is no greater secret than to do and labour faithfully in the practice of divine love, if we aspire to uniting ourselves with our Beloved. But I wish you to remark that when I say we must labour, I always mean with the superior part of our soul; as for all the repugnances of the inferior part, we must not be more disturbed at them, than the passers by are at the dogs that bark at a distance. Those who being at a feast, go tasting every dish and eat a little of each one, derange their stomach very much, and bring on such an indigestion

that they cannot sleep all night," those souls who want to try all the methods and means that conduct, or can conduct, to perfection, do the same; for the stomach of their will not having heat enough to digest and put in practice so many methods, there arises a certain crudity and indigestion, which takes away that peace and tranquillity of mind with our Lord, which is the one thing necessary that Mary chose, and that will not be taken from her.

Let us pass now to the other question you asked me, that is, what you can do to strengthen your resolutions, and to make them effectual. There is no better way, my daughter, than to put them in practice; but you say that you always remain so weak, that although you often make strong resolutions not to fall into the imperfection of which you desire to cure yourself, when the occasion presents itself you are sure to fall to the ground. Do you wish me to tell you why we remain so weak? it is because we will not abstain from unwholesome food; as if a person wishing not to have a pain in his stomach, were to ask a physician what he should do, and be told, do not eat such and such dishes, because they produce crudities which afterwards cause pain, and yet he would not abstain from them. We do the same; we would wish, for example, to love correction, but we will nevertheless be obstinate. Oh! that is folly—that cannot be. You cannot be strong enough to bear correction courageously, while you will eat the meat of self-esteem. I wish to

* "Se detraquent fort l'estomac, dans lequel il se fait une si grande indigestion, que cela les empèche de dormir toute la nuit, ne pouvant faire autre chose que cracher."

keep my soul recollected, and nevertheless I will not retrench so many useless reflections—that cannot be done. O, my God! I wish to be firm and invariable in my exercises, but I also wish not to have so much trouble with them. In a word, I want to find the work all done; that cannot be during this life, for we shall always have to work. The Feast of the Purification, as I once told you, has no octave. We must make two equally strong resolutions; one to be prepared to see weeds grow in our garden, the other to have the courage to see them rooted up, and to root them up ourselves; for our self-love will not die while we live, and it is that which produces these evil effects. For the rest, it is not being weak if we sometimes fall into venial sins, provided that we raise ourselves again immediately by a return of our soul to God, humbling ourselves calmly and gently. We must not think we can live without always committing some, for no one but our Lady had that privilege. Certainly, if they delay us a little, as I have already said, they do not, however, turn us out of the way; a single glance at God effaces them. Lastly, we must know that we must never cease to make good resolutions, though we may plainly see that we do not usually practise them, and even though we may see that it is impossible to practise them, when the occasion presents itself; and this we must do with more firmness than if we felt in ourselves sufficient courage to succeed in our enterprise, saying to our Lord, "It is true that I shall not have strength of myself to do or to bear such a thing, but I rejoice at it inasmuch as it will be Thy strength that will do it in me," and, upon this support, go courageously to the battle, and do

not doubt that you will gain the victory. Our Lord treats us just in the same way as a good father, or a good mother who lets a child walk quite alone when it is in a soft meadow where the grass is thick, or upon moss; because if it falls it will not hurt itself much; but on bad and dangerous roads, she carries it carefully in her arms. We have often seen souls courageously bear great assaults without being overcome by their enemies, who have afterwards been vanquished in very trifling encounters. And why is this? except that our Lord, seeing that they would not be much hurt in falling, has let them walk alone, which He did not do when they were among the precipices of great temptations, whence He delivered them with His almighty hand. St. Paula, who was so generous in disentangling herself from the world, leaving the city of Rome and so many luxuries, and who could not be shaken by her maternal affection for her children, so resolved was her heart to quit everything for God, after having done all these great wonders, let herself be overcome by the temptations of her own judgment, which persuaded her that she need not submit to the opinion of several holy persons who wished her somewhat to diminish her customary austerities; in which St. Jerome allows that she was to blame. Let us remark, in conclusion, that all we have said in this Conference is on delicate points of perfection; and that therefore no one of you who have heard it, need be astonished if she does not find herself arrived at this perfection; since, by the grace of God, you all have a good courage in wishing to aim at it. Vive Jésus.

CONFERENCE X.

ON OBEDIENCE.

Obedience is a moral virtue, which depends upon justice. Now there are certain moral virtues, which have so much affinity with the theological ones (which are faith, hope, and charity), that they seem almost theological, though they are in a very inferior order, as penance, religion, justice, and obedience. Now, obedience consists of two points; the first is to obey superiors; the second to obey equals and inferiors. But this second belongs rather to humility, sweetness, and charity, than to obedience; for he who is humble, thinks that all others surpass him, and are much better than he is, so that he makes them his superiors and thinks he ought to obey them; but as to the obedience we owe to the superiors whom God has appointed to govern us, it is of justice and necessity, and must be rendered with an entire submission of our understanding and of our will. Now this obedience of the understanding is practised, when, being commanded we accept and approve of the command, not only with our will, but also with our understanding, approving and esteeming the thing commanded, and judging it better than anything else that might have been commanded us on that occasion. When we have attained to this, we then so love to obey, that we have an insatiable desire of being commanded, in order that all we do, may be done through obedience. And this is the obe-

dience of the perfect, and that which I desire for you; which is a pure gift of God, or else is acquired with much time and labour by a quantity of acts often repeated, and made by main force, by means of which we shall acquire the habit. Our natural inclination always leads us to the desire of commanding, and gives us an aversion to obeying; and nevertheless, it is certain that we have much capacity for obeying, and perhaps we have none at all for commanding.

The most ordinary obedience has three conditions. The first is to like the thing that is commanded us, and to bend our will to it sweetly, loving to be commanded; for having nobody to command us is not the way to make us truly obedient; as also living alone in a desert is not the way to become patient. Cassian relates that being in the desert he sometimes grew angry, and that taking up a pen to write, he threw it away if it would not mark; so that, he says, it is to no purpose being alone, since we carry anger about with us. Virtue is a good in itself, which does not depend on the absence of its opposite.

The second condition of obedience is promptitude, to which is opposed indolence or spiritual sadness; for it seldom happens that a melancholy soul does anything quickly and diligently (in theological language, indolence is called spiritual sadness), and that is what prevents it from obeying promptly and courageously. The third is perseverance; for it is not sufficient that we like the command and execute it for a time, if we do not persevere, since it is this perseverance which obtains the crown. We find everywhere admirable examples of perseverance, but particularly in the life of St. Pacomius.

There are monks who have persevered with incredible patience in doing only one exercise all their lives; like the good Father Jonas, who in all his life never did anything, besides gardening, but make mats, and was so accustomed to it that he made them with his window shut, while he meditated and prayed; the one did not hinder the other; so that they found him dead with his legs crossed and his mat fastened on his knees; he died doing what he had done all his life. It is an act of great humility to continue all one's life through obedience one and the same exercise when it is abject; for there may arise many temptations, to think oneself capable of something greater. Now this third condition is the most difficult of all, on account of the lightness and inconstancy of the human mind; for at one time we like to do a thing, and at another we do not wish to look at it. If we would follow all the impulses of our mind, or if it were possible to do so without scandal or dishonour, we should see nothing but changes. First we should wish to be in one condition, and then we should seek after another; so extravagant is this inconstancy of the human mind; but we must arrest it by the force of our first resolutions, in order to live evenly amid the unevenness of our feelings and of events. Now, to induce ourselves to love obedience, we must when we find ourselves tempted, make considerations on its excellence, its beauty, its merit, and its usefulness, to encourage ourselves to persevere; this is for souls not yet well established in obedience: but when there is question only of a simple aversion or dislike to the thing commanded, we must make an act of

love and set ourselves to the work. Our Lord Himself in His Passion felt a very great disgust and mortal aversion to suffering death. He says so Himself; but with the highest point of His spirit He was resigned to the will of His Father; all the rest was an impulse of nature. The most difficult perseverance is in interior things; for as to material and exterior things, they are easy enough. This is because it annoys us to subdue our understanding; it is the last part that we surrender, and nevertheless it is quite necessary that we should confine our thoughts to certain objects; so that when we have exercises or practices of virtue marked out for us, we should continue in these exercises and submit our mind to them. I do not call it failing in perseverance, when we make some little interruptions, provided that we do not give up entirely; as it is not failing in obedience, to fail in some of its conditions, seeing that we are obliged to the substance of virtues, and not to the conditions. For even though we obey with repugnance, and almost as if forced to it by the obligation of our state, our obedience does not fail to be good, in virtue of our first resolution; but it is of infinitely great value and merit, when it is rendered with the conditions we have spoken of. For ever so small a thing done with such a spirit of obedience, is of very great value.

Obedience is so excellent a virtue that our Lord chose to guide the whole course of His life by obedience, saying very often, that He was come not to do His own will but that of His Father. And the Apostle says that He made Himself "obedient unto death, even to the death

of the cross,"* and willed to add to the infinite merit of His perfect charity, the infinite merit of a perfect obedience. Charity yields to obedience, because obedience depends on justice. Also it is better to pay what we owe than to give alms; that is to say, it is better to obey than to do an act of charity from our own inclination.

The second point in which obedience consists is rather humility than obedience; for this sort of obedience is a certain pliancy of our will in following the will of others, and it is an extremely amiable virtue, which makes our spirit ready to turn in any direction, and disposes us always to do the will of God. For example, if I am going to one place, and I meet a sister who tells me to go elsewhere, the will of God for me is that I should do what she wishes, rather than what I wish. But if I oppose my opinion to hers, the will of God for her is that she should yield to me, and so in all things that are indifferent. But if it happens that on this first opinion both wish to yield, you must not continue that contest, but consider which would be the best and most reasonable, and then do it simply; and that must be conducted by discretion. For it would not be becoming to give up something that was of necessity, in order to condescend to an indifferent thing. If I wished to make an act of great mortification, and another sister came to tell me not to do it, or to do another, I would put off my first design if possible to some other time, in order to do her will, and then I would finish my undertaking afterwards. And if I could not put it off, or omit it,

* Philippians ii. 8.

and if what she wished me to do was not necessary, I would do what I had first undertaken; and then if possible, I would take a convenient opportunity of doing what the sister desired of me. If it happens that a sister requires us to do something, and that out of surprise we show that we feel repugnance to it, the sister must not take umbrage, nor appear to know it, nor beg us not to do it; for it is not in our power to prevent our colour, our eyes and our countenance from betraying the combat going on within us, though our reason may be willing to do the thing; for they are messengers who come without being asked for, and who when told to go usually do nothing of the kind. To what purpose, then, would this sister have me not do what she asked me, only because she perceives that I feel repugnance to it? She ought to be glad that I should reap this profit for my soul. You will answer me, it is because she is afraid of having vexed me. No, it is self-love which is unwilling that I should have the least thought that she is troublesome. Yet I should have it, though I might not dwell upon it. If, however, I add to the signs of my repugnance, words which openly show that I do not wish to do what this sister asks me, she may and ought to tell me sweetly not to do it, when she and I are equal; but those in authority must be firm, and make their inferiors bend to them. Now, although a sister may have entirely refused me something, or shown repugnance, I ought not to lose confidence in her so as not to employ her another time, nor ought I even to be disedified by her imperfection; for at this time I bear with her, and presently she will bear with me; now she has an aversion to doing that

thing, and another time she will do it willingly. If, however, I knew by experience that it was a mind not yet capable of being treated in this manner, I should wait some time, till she should be better disposed. We are all liable to the faults we see in others, and we must be nowise astonished at meeting with them; for if we remain a long time without committing a fault, we shall afterwards do nothing but fall, and we shall commit many great imperfections, of which we must take advantage, profiting by the abjection which they bring us. We must suffer with patience the delay of our perfection, always doing what we can for our advancement, and with good courage.

Oh how happy are those who, living in expectation, do not grow weary of waiting! this I say to many, who desiring to perfect themselves by acquiring virtues, would possess them all at once, as if perfection consisted only in desiring it; it would be indeed well if we could be humble as soon as we desire to be so, without further trouble. We must accustom ourselves to seek the realisation of our perfection, by the ordinary ways, in tranquillity of heart, doing all that we can to acquire virtues, by faithfully practising each one according to our condition and vocation; and we must remain in expectation of attaining sooner or later to the end of our desires, leaving that to Divine Providence, which will take care to console us at the time it has appointed to do so; and even if it should be only at the hour of our death, it should suffice us; provided that we fulfil our duty, by doing always what depends on us and is in our power—we shall always have what we desire soon enough, whenever we have it, and whenever it shall

please God to give it to us. This expectation and resignation is very necessary, for the want of it much disturbs the soul. We must be content to know that we are doing well, through him who governs us, and not seek for feelings or particular knowledge; but walk, like the blind, in this confidence in God and His Providence, even amid desolations, fears, darkness, and every other sort of cross it may please Him to send us. Remain, then, my dear daughter, perfectly abandoned to His guidance, without any exception or reserve whatever; and let Him do as He will, trusting to His goodness all the care of your soul and body, keeping yourself thus wholly resigned, and reposing in God, under the guidance of superiors, without any other care than to obey. Now, the way to acquire this docility to the will of others, is often to make in prayer acts of indifference, and then to put them in practice when the occasion presents itself; for it is not enough to renounce oneself before God, inasmuch as that is no difficult matter, being done only with the imagination; but when we have to do it in reality, and when having just given ourselves all to God, we find a creature commanding us, there is a great difference, and it is then that we must show our courage. This gentleness and condescension to our neighbour's will is a virtue of great price, it is the symbol of the prayer of union; for as this prayer is nothing else than the renouncement of ourselves in God, when the soul says with truth, "I have no other will but Thine O Lord;" and is entirely united to God; so the renouncing our will to do always that of our neighbour, is the true union with our neighbour, and we must do all this for the love of God. It often happens that a

person, little and weak in body and mind, who exercises herself only in little things, will do them with so much charity, that they will far surpass in merit great and lofty actions; for these lofty actions are for the most part done with less charity, on account of the attention and divers considerations bestowed upon them. Nevertheless, if a great work is done with as much charity as a little one, no doubt he who does it has much more merit and reward. Lastly, charity gives the price and value to all our works; so that we must do for the love of God all the good that we do; and the evil that we avoid, we must avoid for the love of God. To the good actions we may do, that are not particularly commanded us, and cannot derive their merit from obedience, we must give merit by charity, though we may do them all by obedience; in short, we must have good courage, and depend only on God; for the character of the daughters of the Visitation is to look for the will of God in everything and follow it.

You asked me once if you might make private prayers; and I answer that as to those little prayers which you feel sometimes inclined to say, there is no harm in them, provided you do not attach yourself to them; so as to have a scruple if you did not say them, or to make a plan of saying every day during a year, or any certain time, some prayer according to your own fancy, for that must not be done. If during silence we sometimes have a devotion to say an *Ave maris stella*, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, or anything else, we may say it without difficulty, and it is good to do so; but we must take great care that this is done without prejudice to a greater good. For example, if you have a devotion

when you are before the Blessed Sacrament, to say the *Pater* three times in honour of the Holy Trinity, and you are called to do something else, you must rise quickly and go and do this action in honour of the Holy Trinity, instead of saying your three *Paters*. You must not then prescribe to yourself to make a certain number of genuflections, of ejaculatory prayers, and such practices, every day, or during any time, without telling the superioress, though you must be very faithful in the practice of elevations and aspirations to God. Now, if you think that it is the Holy Spirit Who inspires you to adopt these little practices, He will be pleased that you ask leave for them, and even that you omit them, if they are not permitted; inasmuch as nothing is so pleasing to Him as religious obedience. Nor can you promise people to say a number of prayers for them. If you are asked to do so, you must answer that you will ask leave; but if a person simply recommends himself to your prayers, you may answer that you will do it willingly, and at the same time raise your mind to God for that person. It is the same with regard to holy Communion; for you cannot offer your Communion for any one without leave. That does not mean that when you are about to receive our Lord, if it occurs to you to remember the wants of some one of your relations, or the common necessities of the nation, you may not recommend them to God, entreating Him to have compassion on them. But if you wish to communicate for some particular thing, you must ask leave, unless it be for your own necessities, as to obtain strength against some temptation, or to ask for some virtue from our Lord. May He be blessed.

CONFERENCE XI.

THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE.

On the same subject of obedience.

There are three kinds of pious obedience, of which the first is common to all Christians, that is, the obedience due to God and to Holy Church, in the observance of their commandments. The second is religious obedience, which indeed is of much greater value than the other, because it not only attaches itself to the commands of God, but also submits itself to the observance of His counsels. There is a third obedience called loving, of which I wish to speak, as being the most perfect; and it is of this that our Lord gave us the example during all the time of His life. The fathers have assigned to this sort of obedience several properties and conditions; but, among them all, I will choose only three, of which the first is that it is, as they call it, blind; the second, that it is prompt; and the third, that it is persevering. Blind obedience has three properties or conditions, of which the first is that it never looks at the countenance of superiors, but only at their authority; the second, that it does not inquire into the reasons and motives of superiors in ordering such and such a thing, being satisfied with knowing that they have ordered it; and the third, that it does not inquire into the means it must take to do what is commanded, being assured that God, by whose inspiration this command has been given, will

certainly give the power to accomplish it; and instead of inquiring how it is to do it, it sets to work.

Religious obedience, then, which ought to be blind, lovingly submits to do quite simply whatever is commanded, without ever thinking whether the command is well or ill given, provided that the person who gives it has the power to do so, and that it serves to unite our soul with God. For beyond that, the truly obedient never do anything. Many persons have been greatly mistaken as to this condition of obedience, thinking that it consisted in doing through thick and thin whatever might be commanded us, even were it against the commandments of God and of Holy Church, in which they were very wrong, imagining that there is in this blindness a folly which does not exist. For in all that concerns the commandments of God, as superiors have no power ever to order anything contrary to them, so inferiors never have any obligation to obey in such a case; if they were to obey, they would sin. Now I well know that many have done things against the commandments of God, by the instinct of this obedience, which seeks to comply not only with the orders of God, and of superiors, but also with their counsels and inclinations. Thus many have rushed into the arms of death by a particular inspiration of God, which was so strong that they could not resist it, for otherwise they would have sinned grievously. It is related in the second book of Machabees, that one named Razias, urged on by an ardent zeal for the glory of God, went and exposed himself to the blows by which he knew that he must encounter wounds and death, and feeling himself wounded in the breast, he drew all his entrails

out of the wound, and threw them into the air in the presence of his enemies. St. Apollonia threw herself into the fire, which the impious enemies of God and of the Christian name, had prepared as the instrument of her death. St. Ambrose also relates the history of three damsels, who, to avoid losing their chastity, threw themselves into a river, where they were drowned in the waters; but these had besides a reason for doing it, which it would be too long to deduce. We see many others who have rushed to death, like him who threw himself into a burning furnace, but all these examples are to be admired, and not imitated; for you know well enough that we must never be so blind as to think we can please God by infringing His commandments.

Loving obedience presupposes that we are obedient to the commandments of God. We say that this obedience is blind, because it equally obeys all superiors. All the ancient fathers strongly blame those who would not submit to obey those who were of lower rank than themselves. They asked them, when you obeyed your superiors, why did you do so? Was it for the love of God? Not at all, for does not this superior hold the place of God among us, as well as the other? No doubt he is the vicar of God, and God commands us by his mouth, and makes us know His will by his orders, as He did by the mouth of the other. You obey your superiors, then, because you have an inclination towards them, and out of respect for their persons? Alas! you do nothing more than worldly people; for they do just the same, and not only do they obey the commands of those they love, but they would not consider their love quite satisfied, if they did not also follow

as closely as possible their inclinations and affections; so the truly obedient person does, as much with regard to his superiors as to God Himself. The pagans, wicked as they were, set us an example in this; for the devil spoke to them by various sorts of idols; some were statues of men, others of rats, dogs, lions, serpents, and such things; and these poor people gave equal faith to all, obeying the statue of a dog as much as that of a man, that of a rat like that of a lion, without any distinction. Why was this? Because they regarded their gods under the divers forms of these statues. St. Paul commands us to obey our superiors, even though they be wicked. Our Lord, our Lady, and St. Joseph, have taught us well this manner of obeying, in the journey they made from Nazareth to Bethlehem. For Cæsar having issued an edict, that all his subjects should go to their birth-place to be enrolled, they went there lovingly to satisfy this obedience, though Cæsar was a pagan and an idolater; our Lord wishing to show by this that we must never consider the persons of those who command, provided they have the authority to command.

Let us now pass to the second property of blind obedience. After it has gained this point of not considering those who command, but of submitting equally to all sorts of superiors, it passes on and comes to the second, which is that of obeying without considering the intention nor the end for which the command is given, being contented with knowing that it is given, without amusing itself with thinking whether it is well or ill given, whether or not it was right to order such or such a thing. Abraham was very praiseworthy in

this obedience. God called him, and said to him, "Abraham, go out from thy land and from thy family; that is to say, from out of thy city, and go to the place that I will show thee." Abraham went without reply. Might he not well have said, "Lord, Thou tellest me to go out of the city; tell me, then, if Thou pleasest, which way I am to go?" He said not a word, but went where the spirit led him, without in any way considering whether he was going right or wrong, or why, or for what purpose God had given him this command so shortly, that He had not even marked out to him the road which He wished him to take. Oh! certainly, the truly obedient person makes no remark; he sets himself simply to the work, without seeking anything else than to obey. It seemed that our Lord Himself wished to show us how pleasing this sort of obedience was to Him, when He appeared to St. Paul to convert him, for, having called him by his name, He threw him prostrate on the ground, and struck him blind. You see, to make him His disciple, He first caused him to fall down, in order to humble and subject him to Himself, then He suddenly rendered him blind, and commanded him to go into the city to seek Ananias, and to do all that he should tell him. But why did not our Lord Himself tell him what he was to do, without sending him any farther, when He had even deigned to speak to him to convert him? St. Paul did all that was commanded him. It would have cost our Lord nothing to say Himself what He made Ananias say to him; but He wished us to learn from this example, how much He loves blind obedience, since He seems to have blinded St. Paul only in order to render him truly obedient. When our Lord would give sight

to him who was born blind, He made clay and put it on his eyes, ordering him to go and wash in the fountain of Siloë. This poor blind man might well have been astonished at the means our Lord made use of to cure him, and have said to Him, "Alas! what are you doing to me? If I were not blind, that would be enough to take away my sight." He did not make any such considerations, but simply obeyed. Thus, the truly obedient person simply believes he can do everything that may be commanded him, because he holds that all commands come from God, or are given by His inspiration, and cannot be impossible, by reason of the power of Him who ordains them.

Naaman the Syrian did not act in this manner, and was near suffering for it. He being a leper, went to be cured by Eliseus, because all the remedies he had tried had been useless to him. Hearing then that Eliseus did great wonders, he went to him, and being arrived, he sent to him one of his attendants, to entreat him that he would cure him. On which Eliseus did not even go out of his room, but sent him word by his servant, that he should go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and that he should be cured. At this answer Naaman began to be angry, and said, "Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?" * and he would not do it; but his attendants remonstrated, and told him he ought to do what was enjoined by the prophet, since it was so easy. He let himself be persuaded by their words, and having washed seven times, he was cured. You see how he ran the risk of not recovering

* 4 Kings v.

his health, by making so many reflections on what was commanded him.

The third property of blind obedience is that it does not consider nor inquire so much by what means it can do what is commanded. It knows that the road it has to follow is the rule of religion, and the orders of superiors; it takes the road in simplicity of heart, without debating whether it would be better to do thus, or thus; provided that it obeys, everything is the same to it; for it well knows that this is sufficient to please God, for the love of whom it obeys purely and simply.

The second condition of loving obedience is that it is prompt. Now, promptitude of obedience has always been recommended to religious, as a very necessary ingredient in obeying well, and perfectly observing what they have vowed to God. It was the sign that Eliezer chose by which to know the maiden whom God had appointed to be the wife of his master's son. He said thus to himself, "She of whom I shall ask water to drink, and who shall say to me, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also, she shall be the one whom I shall recognise as the worthy wife of my master's son." And as he was musing on this, he saw at a distance the beautiful Rebecca. Eliezer seeing her so beautiful and gracious, by the well from whence she was drawing water for her sheep, made his request to her, and the damsel answered according to his intention; "Yes," she said, "not only for you, but also for your camels." Remark, I beg of you, how prompt and gracious she was. She did not spare her trouble, she was very liberal of it, for it required not a little water to satisfy so many camels as Eliezer had with him. Oh, in truth, obedience

rendered with a bad grace is not at all agreeable. There are some who obey, but with such slowness, and such unwilling looks, that they much diminish the merit of this virtue. Charity and obedience are so united together, that they cannot be separated. Love makes us obey promptly; for however difficult may be the thing commanded, he who has a loving obedience undertakes it lovingly; because obedience being a principal part of humility, which loves submission above all things, the obedient person consequently loves the command; and as soon as he perceives it afar off, whatever it may be, whether to his taste or not, he embraces it, caresses and cherishes it tenderly. There is in the life of St. Pacomius an example of this promptitude in obedience which I will relate to you. Among the religious of St. Pacomius, there was one named Jonas, a man of great virtue and sanctity, who had charge of the garden, in which was a fig-tree that bore very fine figs. Now, this fig-tree was a source of temptation to the young religious; every time they passed near it, they looked a little at these figs. St. Pacomius had remarked it, and walking one day in the garden, he raised his eyes to the fig-tree, and saw the devil at the top, looking at the figs from above, as the religious looked at them from below. This great saint, who desired to train his religious no less to a total mortification of the senses than to the interior mortification of the passions and inclinations, called Jonas and ordered him to cut down the fig-tree next day without fail. To which poor Jonas replied, "Oh, father, we must bear a little with these young people, they should be allowed a little recreation; it is not for myself that I wish to preserve it." Whereupon the

father answered very sweetly, "Well brother, you have not been willing to obey simply and promptly, but what will you say if the tree is more obedient than you?" This really happened, for the next day it was found withered, and it never bore fruit more. Poor Jonas said very truly that it was not for himself that he wanted to keep the fig-tree; for it was observed that during seventy-five years that he lived in religion, and was gardener, he had never touched any of the fruit of his garden; but he was very liberal of it towards his brothers; yet he learnt how commendable is promptitude of obedience. Our Lord during His whole life gave coutinual examples of this prompt obedience; for nothing can ever equal His promptitude and pliability to the will of every one. By His example we must learn to be very prompt in obedience, for it does not suffice to the loving heart, to do what is commanded or what is shown to be desired, if it is not done promptly; it thinks the hour cannot come soon enough to accomplish what has been ordered, so that it may again receive some fresh command. David only expressed a simple wish to drink of the water of the cistern of Bethlehem, and immediately three knights crossed at full speed the army of the enemy, and went to seek it for him. They were extremely prompt in complying with the king's wish.

So we see many great Saints have followed what seemed to them to be the inclinations and desires of our Lord, the King of kings. What command, I ask you, has our Lord ever given, which could oblige St Catharine of Siena to drink or to lick with her tongue the matter which came out of the wound of

the poor woman she was serving; or St. Louis, King of France, to eat with the lepers the remains of their soup to encourage them to eat? They certainly were not at all obliged to do this; but knowing that our Lord loved and had shown an inclination to the love of one's own abjection, and thinking to please Him by following His inclination, they did these things, with great love, though very repugnant to their senses. We are obliged to succour our neighbour when he is in extreme necessity; however, because almsgiving is a counsel of our Lord, many people willingly give alms to the extent of their means. Now, on this obedience to counsels is grafted the loving obedience which makes us undertake to follow with great exactness the desires and intentions of God and of our superiors. But I must here warn you of an illusion into which you might fall; if those who would undertake to practise this virtue very exactly, were to keep themselves always on the watch, that they might know the desires and inclinations of their superiors, or of God, they would infallibly lose their time. For example, while I was seeking to know what might be the desire of God, I should not occupy myself in keeping near Him in repose and tranquillity, which is the desire He now has, since He gives me nothing else to do. Thus if any one, to follow the inclination that our Lord has shown that we should assist the poor, should go from town to town to seek them, who does not see that while he is in one place he cannot serve those who are in another? It is necessary to go about this work in simplicity of heart, to give alms when I meet with the occasion, without spending my time in the streets going from house to house, to find out whether there is

not some poor person that I do not know. In the same way, when I perceive that the superior desires something of me, I must set about it quickly, without trying to find out whether he has any inclination that I should do something else; for that would take away the peace and tranquillity of heart which is the principal fruit of loving obedience.

The third condition of obedience is perseverance. Now this our Lord teaches us very particularly. St. Paul has declared it in these terms: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death:" * and enhancing this obedience, he says, "even to the death of the cross." In these words, even to death, it is presupposed that He had been obedient all the time of His life, during which we see nothing but acts of obedience rendered by Him, both to His parents and many others, even to the impious and wicked; and as He began by this virtue, so by it He finished the course of this mortal life. The good religious, Jonas, furnishes us with two examples on the subject of perseverance: and though he did not obey so quickly the command given him by St. Pacomius, he was nevertheless a very perfect religious; for from the time he entered religion till his death, he continued in the office of gardener, without ever changing it during seventy-five years that he lived in that monastery; and the other exercise in which he persevered also all his life, as I have told you before, was that of making mats of rushes interwoven with palm leaves, so that he died in the act of making them. It is a great virtue to persevere so long in such

* Philippians ii. 8.

an exercise; for it costs nothing to do cheerfully a thing that we are told to do once, as often as may be; but when we are told, you shall always do it all your life, it is in that there is virtue, there lies the difficulty. This, then, is all I had to tell you touching obedience, unless it be this saying, that obedience is of such great value, that it is the companion of charity; and these two are the virtues which give worth and value to all the others; so that without them all the others are nothing. If you have not these two virtues, you have none at all; if you have them, you have at the same time all the others.

But to pass on, leaving aside the general obedience to the commands of God, and speaking of religious obedience, I say that if the religious does not obey, he cannot have any virtue; because it is principally obedience that makes him a religious, as being the proper and especial virtue of religion. You may have even the desire of martyrdom for the love of God, that is nothing, if you have not obedience. We read in the life of St. Pacomius, that one of his religious having persevered during all the time of his novitiate in an exemplary humility and submission, came to St. Pacomius, and said to him, transported with great fervour, that he had a very great desire of martyrdom; that he would never be content if that did not happen to him; that he most humbly entreated him to pray to God that he might accomplish it. The holy father tried to moderate this fervour; but the more he said, the more eager the other became in his desire. The Saint said to him, "My son, it is better to live in obedience, and to die every day while living by continual mortification of

oneself, than to martyrise our imagination; he who mortifies himself well, is sufficiently a martyr; it is a greater martyrdom to persevere all one's life in obedience, than to die in an instant by the sword. Live in peace, my son, and tranquillize your mind, turning it away from this desire." The religious who felt sure that his desire proceeded from the Holy Spirit, abated nothing of his ardour, always pressing the father to pray that his desire might be accomplished. A little while after that, news was received likely to console him; for a certain Saracen, a chief of robbers, came to a mountain near the monastery. On which St. Pacomius called him to him and said, "Now then, my son, the hour is come that you have so much desired; go as soon as you please to cut wood on the mountain." The religious, overcome with joy, went away singing and chanting the praises of God, giving Him thanks that He had deigned to do him the honour of giving him this opportunity of dying for His love: in effect he fully intended to do what he undertook. Now, when the robbers perceived him, they came straight to him, and began to seize and to menace him. For a little while he was very valiant. "Thou art a dead man," said they. "I desire nothing else but to die for God," he answered, and such like replies. The Saracens conducted him to their idol, to make him adore it. When they saw that he constantly refused, they began to set about putting him to death. Alas! this poor religious, who was so valiant in imagination, seeing the sword at his throat, cried out, "Ah! pray do not kill me, I will do whatever you wish; have pity on me, I am still young; it would be a pity to cut short my days." At

last he adored their idol; and these wicked men laughing at him, beat him well, and then let him return to his monastery; where being arrived more dead than alive, all pale and shuddering, St. Pacomius, who had come to meet him, said to him: "Well, my son, what is the matter, that you are so overwhelmed?" Then the poor religious, all ashamed and confused, because he had some pride, not being able to bear to see that he had committed so great a fault, threw himself on the ground, and confessed his fault. This the father quickly remedied, making the brothers pray for him; and making him ask pardon of God, he restored him to a good state, and then gave him good warnings, saying, "My son, remember that it is better to have lowly desires of living in Community, and to wish only for fidelity in the observance of the Rules, without undertaking or desiring anything else but what is comprised therein, than to have lofty desires of doing imaginary wonders, which are only fit to swell our hearts with pride, and to make us despise others, thinking ourselves to be indeed something greater than they. Oh! how good it is to live under the shelter of holy obedience, rather than to withdraw ourselves from its arms, in order to seek what seems to us more perfect! If thou hadst been content, as I told thee, to mortify thyself well in thy life, when thou didst wish for nothing less than death, thou wouldst not have fallen as thou hast done; but be of good courage, remember to live henceforth in submission, and be assured that God has pardoned thee." He obeyed the advice of the Saint, and conducted himself with great humility all the rest of his life.

I say also that obedience is of no less merit than

charity. For, to give a glass of water out of charity merits heaven: our Lord Himself says so. Do the same out of obedience, and you will gain the same reward. The least little thing done from obedience is very agreeable to God; if you eat from obedience, your eating is more pleasing to God than the fasts of the anchorets, if they are made without obedience; rest yourself out of obedience, and your rest is more meritorious and more pleasing to God than voluntary labour. But, you will say to me, what shall I obtain by practising so exactly this loving obedience, with all these conditions, blindly, promptly, and perseveringly? O my dear daughters, whoever shall do it will enjoy in his soul a continual tranquillity, and the most holy peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding. He will have no account to render of his actions, since they will all have been done from obedience, as well to the rules as to superiors. What happiness can be more useful or desirable than that? The truly obedient person, we may say by the way, certainly loves the Rules, and honours and esteems them only, as the true road by which he is to travel towards the union of his soul with God; and therefore he never turns aside from this road, nor from the observance of those things that are said in them by way of direction, any more than of those that are commanded. The truly obedient will live sweetly and peaceably, like an infant in the arms of its dear mother, which is not disturbed by the thought of what may happen to it; whether she carries it on the right arm or the left, it does not care. So the truly obedient, whatever may be commanded him is never troubled; provided that he is commanded, and is always

in the arms of obedience (I mean in the exercise of obedience) he is satisfied. Now to him I can, on God's part, promise Paradise for eternity, as also that he will enjoy true tranquillity in this mortal life: we must have no doubt of it.

You ask me now whether you are obliged under pain of sin to do all that the superiors tell you to do; as when you make your manifestation, whether you must take as a command all that the superioress says to you which is calculated for your advancement. Oh, no! my daughter, superiors have not, any more than confessors, the intention of always obliging inferiors by the orders they give; and when they wish to do so, they use the phrase of order under pain of disobedience; and then inferiors are obliged to obey under pain of sin, though the order may be trifling and unimportant; but not otherwise; for they give advice in three ways, in the form of command, of counsel, or of simple direction. In the constitutions and rules, it is exactly the same; there are articles that say, The sisters may do such a thing; and others that say, They shall do or shall avoid doing. The first are counsels, and the others are commands. Those who would not submit themselves to the counsels and direction, would contravene loving obedience; and it would show great cowardice and want of love for God, if they would only do what was commanded them and nothing more; and when they will not submit to follow direction, though they do not fail in the obedience they have vowed, which is that of commands and counsels, yet they fail in the loving obedience which should be the aim of all daughters of the Visitation.

You ask me whether you may not be allowed to think, when your superioress is changed, that she is not so capable as the one you had before, and that she has not so much knowledge of the way in which you are to be conducted. Oh, to be sure, we cannot prevent such a thought from arising, but we must not dwell upon it. For if Balaam was well instructed by an ass, still more ought we to believe that God, who has given us this superioress, will cause her to teach us according to His will, although not perhaps according to our own. Our Lord has promised that the truly obedient shall never be lost. No certainly, I can assure you that they can never err who follow implicitly the will and the direction of the superiors whom God shall place over them, even though the superiors may be ignorant, and guide their inferiors according to their ignorance, and even by rough and dangerous ways, while the inferiors submit themselves to everything that is not manifestly sinful, nor contrary to the commands of God and of His holy Church. "An obedient man," says holy Scripture, "shall speak of victory;" * that is to say he shall be the conqueror in all the difficulties into which he may be brought by obedience, and shall come with honour out of all the paths into which obedience may lead him, however dangerous they may be. It would be a curious way of obeying, if we would obey only the superiors who were agreeable to us. If today, having a superioress much esteemed both for her talent and her virtues, you obey her willingly; and tomorrow, when you have another who is not so much esteemed, you do not

* Proverbs xxi. 28.

obey her so heartily, rendering her indeed a like obedience, but not esteeming so much what she says to you, and not doing it with as much satisfaction; who does not see that you obey the other from inclination and not purely for God? For if it were not so, you would take as much pleasure in, and esteem as much what you are told to do by the one as by the other. I am accustomed to say a thing which it is always useful to repeat, because we must always observe it, and it is that all our actions should be done according to the superior part of the soul; for it is thus we must live in this house, and never according to our senses and inclinations. No doubt I should have more satisfaction, as to the inferior part of my soul, in doing what is ordered by a superioress towards whom I have an inclination, than in doing what another may tell me, for whom I have none at all; but provided I obey them equally as to the superior part, it is enough; and my obedience is of more value when I take less pleasure in it, because it is thus that we show that we obey for God and not for our own pleasure. There is nothing more common in the world than this way of obeying those whom we love; but the other is extremely rare, and is not practised except in religion. But, you may say, is it not permitted to disapprove of what this superioress does, nor to say nor think why she gives orders which the other did not? No, certainly not; never, my dear daughters; we must approve all that superioresses do or say, allow or forbid, provided it is not manifestly contrary to the commands of God; for in that case it must neither be obeyed nor approved. But except in that case, inferiors must always believe and make their

own judgment confess, that superiors do quite right, and that they have good reasons for what they do; for otherwise we should make ourselves superiors, and the superior our inferior, since we should become judges in her cause. No, we must bend our shoulders to the yoke of holy obedience, believing that both these two superioresses had good reasons for the commands they gave though they may be different or even contrary to each other.

But would it not be allowable that a sister who has already lived long in religion, and rendered great services in it, should relax a little in obedience, at least in some little thing? O good God! would not that be acting like a pilot, who having brought his vessel to the port, after having laboured long and painfully to save it from the perils of the gales and the waves of the sea, should choose at last, being arrived in port, to destroy his ship and throw himself into the water? Would not one consider him mad? For if that were his intention, he need not have taken such pains to bring the vessel to the harbour. The religious who has begun well has not done all, if he does not persevere to the end. We must not say that it belongs only to novices to be so exact. Although one usually sees the novices in every religious Order very exact and mortified, it is not that they are obliged to be more so than the professed; oh, no, they are not by any means; but they persevere in obedience, in order to attain to the grace of profession. But the professed are obliged to it by the vows they have made, which are not sufficient to make them religious, if they do not observe them. The religious who should think he might relax in anything

after his profession, or after having lived long in religion, would be very much mistaken. Our Lord showed Himself more exact in letting Himself be handled and led about, at His death than in His infancy, as I have already said: and this is enough about obedience to give us an affection for it.

There are only a few words more to be said on the question that was asked me yesterday evening; that is, whether it is allowable for the sisters to tell each other that they have been mortified on some occasion by the superioress or by the novice-mistress. Now, I answer that it may be done in three ways. The first is that a sister may say, "Good God! sister, how well our Mother has just mortified me!" quite joyous that she has been worthy of this mortification, and that the superioress has made her gain this advantage for her soul, telling her plainly of her fault without sparing her; and she imparts her joy to her sister, that she may help her to thank God for it. The second way in which it may be done is to relieve herself; she finds the mortification or correction very heavy, and she goes to lighten it a little, by telling it to her sister, who by pitying her will take off a part of the burden; and this way is not so allowable as the first, because we commit an imperfection by complaining. But the third would be entirely bad, that is to tell it by way of murmur and anger, and to show that the superioress was in the wrong. Now, I know well that by God's grace this fault is not committed in this house. As to the first way, though there is no harm in it, it would still be well not to tell it, but to be occupied within ourselves, in rejoicing in it with God. In the second way, we certainly ought not to do it; for by means

of our complaint we lose the merit of the mortification. Do you know what we should do, when we are corrected and mortified? We should take this mortification like an apple of love, and hide it in our heart, kissing and caressing it as tenderly as possible. To go also and say, "I have just been speaking to our Mother, and I am as dry as I was before; one must keep to God; for my part I get no consolation from creatures; I am less consoled than before;" this is not right. The sister to whom this is said, ought to answer very gently: "My dear sister, why were you not closely attached to God, as you say one ought to be, before you went to speak to our Mother? then you would not have been displeased that she did not console you. But when you say you must keep closely to God; take care lest seeking God when creatures fail you, He may not allow you to find Him; for He will be sought before all things and to the contempt of all things. Because creatures do not content me, I seek the Creator; oh, no, the Creator well deserves that I should quit all for Him; and so He wills us to do." When we come out, then, from the superioress quite dry and without having received a single drop of consolation, we must bring away our dryness like a precious balm, as we do the affections which we receive in holy prayer—like a balm I say, and we must take great care not to let a drop be spilt of this precious liquor, which has been sent to us from heaven as a very great gift, in order to perfume our heart with the loss of the consolation that we thought to find in the words of the superioress. But there is one thing to be remarked on this subject, which is that when we go to speak to the superioress, we sometimes carry with us a

dry and hard heart, which is not capable of being watered or moistened with the water of consolation, inasmuch as it is not at all susceptible of what the superioress says; and though she may speak very well and suitably to your need, yet it seems to you that she does not. Another time when your heart is tender and well disposed, she will say but three or four words much less useful for your perfection than the others were, and you will be quite consoled. And why? Because your heart was prepared for them. You imagine that superiors have consolation on their lips and can easily pour it out into the hearts of whom they will, which, however, is not the case; for they cannot always be in the same humour, any more than others. Most happy is he who can keep an equable heart amid all this inequality of circumstances. Sometimes we shall be consoled, and soon afterwards our hearts will be dry, and to such an extent that it will cost us very dear to speak words of consolation.

You have also asked me to tell you what was the exercise best fitted to destroy private judgment, I answer that it is the cutting off all sorts of discourses and occasions where it would make itself the master, and making it feel that it is only a servant. For, my dear daughters, it is only by repeated acts that we acquire virtues, though there have been some souls to whom God has given them all in one moment. When, then, you feel a desire to judge whether a thing is well or ill ordered, deprive your own judgment of that discussion. And when, soon after, you are told that such a thing must be done in such a manner, do not amuse yourself in discussing or discerning whether it would not be better

otherwise; but make your judgment allow that the thing could never be better done than in the manner you have been told. If some exercise is given you, do not permit your judgment to consider whether it will be fitting for you or not; and, take notice that, if you do the thing as you were ordered, your own judgment often does not obey, I mean does not submit itself; for it does not approve of the command, which is usually the cause of the repugnance we feel to submittiug to do what is wished, because the understanding and judgment represent to the will that it ought not to be done, or that what we are told to do should be done in some way different from the way pointed out to us. It cannot submit, because it always gives more weight to the reasons brought by private judgment than to any others; for every one thinks his own judgment the best. I have never met with any one who did not value his own judgment, except two persons who confessed to me that they had no judgment. And once one of these having came to see me, said to me, "Sir, I beg of you to tell me a little about such a thing; for I have no judgment to understand it;" which astonished me greatly. We have in our own age a very remarkable example of the mortification of private judgment. It is that of a great doctor, much renowned, who composed a book entitled, "On Dispensations and Commands," which, falling one day into the hands of the Pope, he judged that it contained some erroneous propositions. He wrote to this doctor that he should erase them from his book. This doctor, on receiving the command, submitted his judgment so absolutely, that he would not justify himself by explaining the matter, but, on the contrary, he be-

lieved that he was wrong, and had let himself be deceived by his own judgment; and, going into the pulpit, he read aloud what the Pope had written to him, took his book and tore it to pieces, and then said aloud that the Pope's judgment on this matter had been most just; that he approved with all his heart of the paternal censure and correction that he had deigned to give him, as being very just, and very mild to him, who deserved to be severely punished, and that he was greatly astonished how he could have been so blind as to let his own judgment mislead him in a thing so manifestly wrong. He was by no means obliged to do this, because the Pope had not commanded it, but only that he should strike out of his book a certain thing which had not seemed good; for what is very remarkable, it was not heretical, nor so manifestly erroneous but that it might have been defended. He showed great virtue on this occasion, and an admirable mortification of his own judgment. One often enough sees the senses mortified, because our own will is employed in mortifying them, and it would be a shameful thing to show ourselves rebellious against obedience; what would be said of us? But one very rarely finds the judgment well mortified. To make ourselves allow that what is commanded is good, to love it, to esteem it as a thing that is good and useful for us beyond all others, oh! it is against this that the judgment rebels. For there are many who say, "I will certainly do as you tell me, but I see very well that it would be better otherwise." Alas! what are you doing, in thus fostering your judgment? No doubt it will intoxicate you; for there is no difference between an intoxicated person and one

who is full of his own judgment. One day that David was in the field with his soldiers, weary and harassed by hunger, finding nothing to eat, he sent to the husband of Abigail for some provisions. Unfortunately this poor man was intoxicated, and, beginning to speak like a drunken man, said that David after having eaten what he had stolen, sent to him to ruin him like others, and that he would not give him anything. David, on hearing this, said, "Truly he shall pay for it, ungrateful as he is for the good I have done him, in saving his flocks and preventing any harm from being done to him." Abigail, knowing David's design, went the next day to meet him, with presents to appease him, using these words, "My Lord, what would you do to a fool? Yesterday, when my husband was drunk, he spoke amiss, but he spoke like a drunken man and like a fool. My Lord, appease your anger, and do not lay hands upon him; for you would regret having laid your hands on a fool." We must make the same excuses for our own judgment, as for an intoxicated person, the one being hardly more capable of reasoning than the other. We must then take great care to prevent it from making these considerations, lest it should intoxicate us with its reasons, especially in what concerns obedience.

Lastly, you wish to know if you ought with great confidence and great care to warn each other, in charity, of your faults. No doubt, my daughter, you must do so; for why should you remark a speck in your sister, but that you may try to remove it by means of a warning? You must nevertheless be discreet in this matter, for it would not be the time to warn a sister when you see her indisposed or oppressed with sadness, since there

would be danger of her rejecting the warning at once. You must wait a little, and then warn her in confidence and charity. If a sister speaks words to you that seem like murmuring, and yet this sister otherwise has her heart undisturbed, you must doubtless say to her quite confidently, "Sister, that is not right." But if you perceive that some passion excites her heart, then you must turn the conversation with all the dexterity you can. You say that you are afraid of warning a sister so often of her faults, because that takes away her courage, and rather makes her fail through fear. O, God! we must not make this judgment of our sisters; for it belongs only to people in the world to lose courage when they are told of their faults. Our sisters love their own abjection too much to do so; they are so far from being troubled by it, that they take, on the contrary, fresh courage and greater care to amend, not in order to avoid being warned, (for I suppose that they supremely love all that can render them vile and abject in their own eyes), but in order to do their duty better and better, and to make themselves more worthy of their vocation.

CONFERENCE XII.

SIMPLICITY.

On religious simplicity and prudence.

The virtue of which we are going to treat, is so necessary that, though I have often spoken of it, you have still desired that I should make it the subject of a whole Conference. Now, we must in the first place learn what this virtue of simplicity is. You know that we commonly call a thing simple, when it is not embroidered, lined or diversified. For example, we say, 'There is a person very simply dressed," because she has no trimming or lining on her gown; I mean no fancy lining that can be seen; but her gown and her dress is of only one material, and that is a simple dress. Simplicity, then, is nothing else than a pure and simple act of charity, which has one only motive, that of acquiring the love of God. And our soul is simple when we have no other aim in all that we do. The well-known history of Martha and Magdalen, who entertained our Lord, is very remarkable on this point. For do you not see that Martha did not fail to be reproved by her Divine Master, though her motive of treating our Lord well was praiseworthy? inasmuch as besides the very good motive that she had for her eagerness, she also looked upon our Lord as Man; and for this reason she thought He was like others, for whom a single dish, or one kind of preparation does not suffice; and that was

what made her over eager, that she might prepare several dishes; and thus she complicated this first motive of the love of God in its exercise, by adding to it several other lesser motives, for which she was reproved by our Lord; "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing only is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part which shall not be taken away from her."* This act then of simple charity, which makes us have no other view in all our actions, than the sole desire of pleasing God, is the part of Mary, which alone is necessary; and this is simplicity, a virtue inseparable from charity, inasmuch as it looks straight to God, without ever suffering any mixture of self-interest, otherwise it would no longer be simplicity, which cannot suffer any return or reflection on creatures, for God alone finds place in it. This virtue is purely Christian. Pagans, even those who have spoken best about the other virtues, have had no knowledge of it, any more than of humility. They have written very well on munificence, liberality, constancy; but never at all on simplicity and humility. Our Lord Himself came down from heaven to make men acquainted with both these virtues; otherwise they would have remained always ignorant of this so necessary doctrine. "Be ye wise as serpents,"† said He to His Apostles. But pass on farther, and be "simple as doves." Learn from the dove to love God in simplicity of heart, having but one aim and one motive in all that you do. But imitate not only the simplicity of their love, in that they never have but one

* St. Luke x. 41, 42. † St. Matth. x. 16.

mate for whom they do everything, and whom alone they wish to please; imitate them also in the simplicity which they practice in the exercise of their love and the proofs they give of it. For they do not do many things nor make many caresses; they simply make their little murmurs round their mates, and content themselves with keeping them company when they are present. Simplicity banishes from the soul the useless care and solicitude that some have to seek out many exercises and ways of being able to love God, as they say; and they fancy they cannot be satisfied unless they do all that the saints have done. Poor people! they torment themselves to find out the art of loving God, and do not know that there is no other but to love Him. They think there is a certain art of acquiring this love, which nevertheless can only be found in simplicity. Now, when we say there is no art, we do not mean to depreciate certain books entitled, "The art of loving God," for these books teach that there is no other art but setting oneself to love Him; that is to say, taking to the practice of those things that are agreeable to Him, which is the only way to find and to acquire this holy love, provided we undertake this practice in simplicity, without disturbance and without solicitude. Simplicity embraces all the means that are prescribed to each one according to her vocation, for acquiring the love of God; so that it wants no other motive to acquire or to be excited to the pursuit of this love, than its object itself; otherwise it would not be perfectly simple; for it cannot endure any other aim, however perfect, but the pure love of God, which is its only object. For example, if you go to the Office, and you

are asked, where are you going? you will answer, "I am going to Office." But why do you go? "I go to praise God." But why rather at this hour than at any other? "Because the bell having rung, I should be remarked if I did not go." The end of praising God in going to Office is very good, but this motive is not simple, for simplicity requires that we should go attracted by the sole desire of pleasing God, without any other consideration, and so of all other things. Now, before going farther, we must lay open a mistake which exists in the minds of many with regard to this virtue; they think that simplicity is contrary to prudence, and that they are opposed to each other, which is not the case. For virtues are never contrary to each other—they are closely united together. The virtue of simplicity is opposed and contrary to the vice of cunning, a vice which is the source from whence proceed deceit, artifice, and duplicity. Cunning is a mass of artifice, deceit, and malice, and it is by means of this vice that we find out inventions to deceive our neighbour and those with whom we have to do, in order to lead them to the point we wish, which is to make them believe we have no other sentiment in our heart than that which we show them by our words, nor any other knowledge of the subject in question; this is very contrary to the simplicity which requires that our interior should be entirely conformable to our exterior. I do not, however, mean to say that we ought to show exteriorly the emotions of our passions as we feel them interiorly; for it is not, as some might think' against simplicity to put on a good countenance at such a time. We must always make a distinction between

the effects of the superior part of our soul and those of the inferior part. It is true that we sometimes feel great emotions in our interior on meeting with a reproof or some other contradiction; but this emotion does not proceed from our will; all this resistance takes place in the inferior part; the superior part does not consent at all; it agrees to, accepts and approves of this circumstance. We have said that simplicity continually looks to the acquisition of the love of God. Now, the love of God requires us to restrain our feelings, to mortify and annihilate them; and this is why it does not require us to manifest and make them known externally. We are not, then, wanting in simplicity if we put on a good countenance when we are inwardly excited. But, you say, would not that be deceiving those who might see us, since they might think us very virtuous, though we were unmortified? This reflection, my dear sister, on what they will say, or what they will think of you, is contrary to simplicity, which we have said looks to pleasing God and not creatures, except so far as the love of God requires. After the simple soul has done an action which she judges right, she thinks no more of it; and if what will be said or thought of her comes into her mind, she quickly puts all that away, because she cannot endure to be in the least turned from her intention of keeping herself attentive to her God, that she may grow in His love. The consideration of creatures does not weigh with her, for she refers everything to the Creator.

The same may be said of the question whether it is not permitted to use prudence in not revealing to superiors what we think might disturb them, or ourselves in

telling it. For simplicity considers only whether it is expedient to say or to do such a thing; and then it sets about doing it at once, without losing time in considering whether or not the superior will be annoyed, or whether I shall be so if I tell him some thought I have had about him; if it is expedient for me to tell it, I shall not fail to tell it simply, happen afterwards what God wills; when I have done my duty, I will not be uneasy about anything else. We must not always be so afraid of disquiet, either for ourselves or for others; for disquiet in itself is not a sin. If I know that on going into some company, some word will be said to me that will disturb and excite me, I ought not to avoid going, but I ought to go armed with the confidence we should have in the Divine protection, that it will strengthen me to overcome nature, against which I wish to make war: this disturbance is only in the inferior part of the soul, and therefore we must not be at all dismayed at it, when it is not followed up; I mean when we do not consent to what it suggests, for in that case we ought not to do it. But from whence do you think comes this disturbance, if not from the want of simplicity? because we often amuse ourselves with thinking, what will be said or what will be thought? instead of thinking of God and of what may render us more pleasing to His Goodness. But if I say such a thing, I shall be more uneasy than before I said it. Well, if you do not wish to say it, and it is not necessary, and you have no need of instruction on this point, resolve quickly, and do not lose time in considering whether you should say it or not; for it would not be reasonable to make an hour's consideration upon all the

little actions of our life. But, moreover, I think for my part, that it is better and more expedient to tell the Superioress the thoughts that most mortify us, than many others that serve no purpose but to lengthen your conversation with her; and if you remain in trouble, that is caused only by immortification. For to what purpose should I say what is not necessary for my improvement, leaving out what may mortify me? Simplicity, as we have already said, seeks nothing but the pure love of God, which never thrives so well as in the mortification of ourselves; and in proportion as mortification increases, we approach nearer to the place where we shall find His Divine love. Besides, superiors ought to be perfect, or at least they ought to do the works of the perfect; and therefore they have their ears open to receive and hear all that people wish to say to them, without troubling themselves much about it. Simplicity does not meddle with what others do or may do; it thinks of itself; and even for itself it entertains only those thoughts that are really necessary, and always turns away quickly from any others. This virtue has a great affinity to humility, which does not allow us to have a bad opinion of anybody but ourselves.

You ask how to observe simplicity in conversations and recreations. I answer you that in this as in all other actions, you must have a holy liberty, and freedom to converse upon subjects that serve to keep up the spirit of joy and of recreation. You must be very artless in conversation, yet you must not be inconsiderate, for simplicity always follows the rule of the love of God; but though you might happen to say some little thing that might seem not to be so well received

by others as you would wish, you must not on that account occupy yourself with making reflections and examinations on all your words. Oh, no! for it is no doubt self-love which induces us to make these enquiries whether what we have said or done is well received; but holy simplicity does not run after its words and actions; it leaves the issue of them to Divine Providence, to which it is supremely attached. It turns neither to the right nor the left, but simply follows its own path. If it meets there with an occasion of practising some virtue, it carefully makes use of it, as of a good means of attaining to its perfection, which is the love of God; but it is not anxious to seek for occasions, nor does it despise them; it is not disturbed at anything, it keeps itself quiet and tranquil in its confidence that God knows its desire to please Him, and that is sufficient for it. But how can one make two things agree that are so contrary to each other? We are told on one side that we must take great care of our perfection and advancement; and on the other, we are forbidden to think of it. Observe here, if you please, the misery of the human mind, which never stops at a medium, but generally runs into extremes. We inherit this fault from our good mother Eve, for she did just the same, when the evil spirit tempted her to eat of the forbidden fruit. She said that God had forbidden them to touch it, instead of saying that He had forbidden them to eat it. You are not told that you must not think of your advancement, no, but that you must not think of it with anxiety.

It is also a want of simplicity when we see each other commit faults, to make so many considerations to

find out whether it is necessary to tell them to the superioress. For, tell me, is not the superioress capable of hearing them, and of judging whether it is required to correct them or not? But, you say, how can I know with what intention that sister did such a thing? It may be that her intention was good; so you ought not to accuse her intention, but her exterior action, if there was imperfection in it. Do not say either that the thing is of little consequence and it is not worth while to put that poor sister to pain about it; for all that is contrary to simplicity. The rule which commands us to procure the amendment of the sisters by means of advertisements, does not command us to be so considerate on this point; as if the honour of the sisters depended on this accusation. We must, indeed, observe and wait for the time most suitable to make this correction; for to make it immediately is rather dangerous; but except that, we must do in simplicity and without scruple what we are obliged to do before God. For though the person may perhaps be angry and troubled after the advertisement you have given, you are not the cause of it, it is only her immortification. And if she directly commits some fault, it will have made her avoid many others that she would have committed if she had persevered in her defect. The superioress ought not to fail to correct the sisters, because they are averse to correction; for we shall always be so as long as we live; inasmuch as to love being humbled and corrected is a thing entirely contrary to the nature of man; but this aversion must not be favoured by our will, which ought to love humiliation.

You wish me to say a few words about the simplicity

with which we should let ourselves be guided as to our interior as well by God as by our superiors. There are some souls that are willing, as they say, to be led by the Spirit of God; and they fancy that everything they imagine comes from the inspirations and movements of the Holy Ghost, who takes them by the hand and conducts them like children in all that they wish to do: in which they are certainly very much mistaken. For was there ever, I ask you, a more special vocation than that of St. Paul, when our Lord Himself spoke to him to convert him? And, nevertheless, He would not instruct him, but sent him to Ananias, saying, "Go into the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do."* And though St. Paul might have said, "Lord, and why not tell me Thyself?" Yet he did not say so, but went away simply to do as he was commanded. And shall we think we are more favoured by God than St. Paul, and that He will conduct us Himself, without the intervention of any creature? The guidance of God for us, my very dear daughters, is nothing else but obedience; for out of that there is nothing but delusion. It is, indeed, certain that all are not led by the same road; but it is also true that each of us cannot know by what road God calls us; that belongs to our superiors, who have light from God for us. We must not say that they do not know us well; for we ought to believe that obedience and submission are always the true marks of a good inspiration; and although it may happen that we have no consolation in the exercises which we are told to make, and that we

* Acts ix. 7.

have a great deal in others, it is not by consolation that the goodness of our actions is judged. We must not be attached to our own satisfaction, for that would be attaching ourselves to the flowers and not to the fruit. You will derive more profit from what you do in following the direction of your superiors, than in following your own interior impulses, for they usually arise only from self-love, which under colour of good, strives to please itself in the vain esteem of ourselves. It is the real truth that your well-being depends on your letting yourselves be guided and governed by the Spirit of God without reserve; and that is the aim of the true simplicity which our Lord has so much recommended to us. "Be simple as doves," * He said to His Apostles. But He does not stop there, saying to them besides: "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." † A child, while he is very little, is reduced to great simplicity, which makes him have no other knowledge than of his mother; he has but one single love, and that is for his mother; and in this love one single desire, which is his mother's bosom; lying on that beloved bosom, he wishes for nothing else. The soul that is perfectly simple has but one single love, which is for God; and in this love she has one single desire, which is to repose on the breast of the Heavenly Father; and there like a loving child, to take up her abode, leaving all the care of herself entirely to her good Father, without troubling herself about anything, except to keep herself in this holy confidence; even the desire of the virtues and graces

* St. Matthew, x. 16. † St. Matthew, xviii. 3.

which seem to her to be necessary, does not disturb her. She neglects nothing that she meets with by the way; but also she is not eager to seek out other means of becoming perfect than those that are prescribed to her. But to what purpose are the pressing and uneasy desires of virtues which it is not necessary we should practise? Gentleness, the love of our own abjection, humility, sweet and cordial charity towards our neighbour, and obedience, are virtues of which the practice ought to be familiar to us, as it is necessary, because the occasions for it are frequent. But as for constancy, munificence, and other such virtues which we shall perhaps never have occasion to practise, let us not be uneasy about them; we shall not be on that account the less magnanimous or generous.

You ask me how souls should conduct themselves in all their actions, who are attracted in prayer to this holy simplicity and to this perfect abandonment of themselves to God? I answer that not only in prayer, but in the conduct of their whole lives, they should walk invariably in the spirit of simplicity, abandoning and referring their whole souls, their actions and their success, to the good pleasure of God, by a love of perfect and absolute confidence, committing themselves to the mercy and care of Divine Providence; and to do this, they should keep their souls steady in this course, not permitting them to go out of the way to make reflections on themselves, to see what they are doing, or whether they are satisfied. Alas! our satisfactions and consolations do not satisfy the eyes of God, they only satisfy that miserable love and care we have of ourselves, independent of God, and without reference to Him. Children,

whom our Lord points out to us as the models of our perfection, certainly have not usually any cares, especially in the presence of their fathers and mothers; they keep themselves attached to them without turning to look either at their satisfactions or their consolations, which they take in good faith, and enjoy in simplicity, without any curiosity as to the causes and effects of them, being too much occupied with love to do anything else. He who is bent on lovingly pleasing the Divine Lover, has neither heart nor leisure to turn to himself, for his spirit will continually lean towards the side to which love attracts it.

This exercise of the continual abandonment of oneself in the hands of God, excellently comprehends within its perfect simplicity and purity, all the perfection of other exercises; and while God leaves us the use of it, we must not change it. Spiritual lovers, the spouses of the Heavenly King, look at themselves from time to time, like doves that are near very pure waters, to see if they are ornamented so as to please their lover; and that is done by the examinations of conscience, in which they cleanse, purify, and adorn themselves as best they can, not to be perfect, not to satisfy themselves, not from the desire of advancing in virtue, but to obey their Spouse, from the reverence they bear Him, and from their extreme desire to please Him. But is it not a very pure and simple love, since they do not purify themselves in order to be pure, they do not adorn themselves in order to be beautiful, but only to please their Spouse, to whom if ugliness were equally agreeable, they would like it as well as beauty? And so these simple doves do not bestow very long nor very

anxious pains on washing and adorning themselves; for the confidence their love gives them that they are greatly beloved, though unworthy, (the confidence I say which their love gives them in the love and goodness of their lover), takes away all anxiety and mistrust lest they should not be beautiful enough; besides which, the desire of loving rather than of adorning themselves and preparing for love, cuts short all careful solicitude, and makes them content themselves with a sweet and faithful preparation, made lovingly and with good will.

And to conclude this point, St. Francis sending his children into the fields, on a journey, gave them instead of money and for their whole provision, this advice, Cast your care on our Lord and He will feed you. I say the same to you, my very dear daughters, cast all your heart, your desires, your cares, and your affections, on the paternal bosom of God, and He will lead you and carry you where His love wishes you to be.

Let us hear and imitate our Divine Saviour, who, like a very perfect Psalmist, sings the surpassing proofs of His love upon the tree of the cross, He concludes them all thus: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."* After we have said that, my dear daughters, what remains but to expire and die the death of love, living no longer to ourselves, but Jesus Christ living in us? Then will cease all the uneasiness of our hearts, arising from the desire suggested by self-love, and from our tenderness for ourselves, which makes us secretly eager in seeking our own perfection and satisfaction; and being embarked in the exercises of our vocation before

* St. Luke xxiii. 46.

the wind of this simple and loving confidence, we shall make great progress, without being aware of it; without moving we shall advance, and without stirring from our place we shall gain ground, as those do who sail with a fair wind on the open sea.

Then all the events and varieties of accidents which occur, are received gently and sweetly. For what can shake or move him who is in the hands of God, and who reposes in His bosom, who has abandoned himself to His love, and has committed himself to His good pleasure? He will certainly in all occurrences, without amusing himself by philosophy on the causes, reasons, and motives of events, pronounce from his heart that holy acquiescence of our Saviour: "Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight." Then we shall be all filled with gentleness and sweetness towards our sisters and our neighbour in general; for we shall see those souls in the breast of the Saviour. Alas! he who regards his neighbour otherwise, runs the risk of loving him neither purely nor constantly, nor equally. But there, who would not love him, who would not bear with him, who would not suffer his imperfections, who would think him disagreeable or wearisome? Now, my most dear daughters, this neighbour is there, in the breast of our Saviour, he is there as being well beloved and so loveable, that the Lover dies for love of him.

Then, too, the natural love of relationship, of appearances, of politeness, of intercourse, of sympathy, of graces, will be purified and reduced to the perfect obedience of the pure love of the Divine good pleasure; and certainly the great aim and happiness of souls that aspire to perfection, would be to have no desire of being

loved by creatures, except with that love of charity which gives us affection for our neighbour, each in his own rank, according to the will of our Lord.

Before we finish, I must say a word on the prudence of the serpent; for, indeed, I thought that if I spoke of the simplicity of the dove, I should directly be reminded of the serpent. Many persons have asked what was the serpent from which our Lord wished us to learn prudence. Leaving aside all the other answers that may be given to this question, we now take the words of our Lord: "Be ye wise as serpents,"* which, when attacked, expose all their body to preserve their head; the same must we do, exposing everything to danger when necessary, in order to preserve in us safe and entire our Lord and His love, for He is our Head, and we are His members, and that is the prudence we should have in our simplicity. I will also mention that we must remember that there are two sorts of prudence, the natural and the supernatural. As to the natural, it must be well mortified, as not being good, and as suggesting to us much unnecessary thought and forecast, which keep our minds far distant from simplicity.

The true virtue of prudence ought to be truly practised, since it is as it were a spiritual salt which gives taste and savour to all the other virtues. But it ought to be so practised by the daughters of the Visitation, that the virtue of simple confidence may surpass everything; for they should have a perfectly simple confidence, which may keep them in repose in the arms of

* St. Matthew, x. 16.

their Heavenly Father, and of their most dear Mother our Lady, being assured that They will ever protect them with Their very loving care, since they are assembled together for the glory of God and the honour of the most Holy Virgin.

Dieu soit béni.

CONFERENCE XIII.

THE SPIRIT OF THE RULES.

On the rules and the spirit of the Visitation.

You have asked me a very difficult question, what is the spirit of your rules, and how you can acquire it? Now, before we speak of this spirit, you must know what it means to have the spirit of a rule, for we often hear it said, "Such a religious has the spirit of his order." We will take from the Holy Gospel two examples well adapted to make you understand this. It is said that St. John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elias, because he boldly and severely reproved sinners, calling them "offspring of vipers,"* and other such words. But what was this power of Elias? it was the power that proceeded from his spirit to destroy and punish sinners, making fire fall from heaven to annihilate and confound those who wanted to resist the Majesty of his Master. The spirit of Elias, then, was

* St. Luke, iii. 7.

one of severity. The other example that we find in the Gospel to our purpose, is that when our Lord would go to Jerusalem, His disciples dissuaded Him, because some wished to go to Capharnaum, and others to Bethany, and thus tried to lead our Lord to the place where they wished to go. For it is not only in our time that inferiors try to lead their masters according to their will. But our Lord, who was very condescending, "yet steadfastly set His face (for the Gospel makes use of these very words) to go to Jerusalem,"* in order that the Apostles might no longer press Him not to go thither. Going, then, to Jerusalem, He wished to pass through a city of Samaria, but the Samaritans would not permit Him. At which St. James and St. John were angry, and so indignant with the Samaritans for their inhospitality to their Master, that they said to Him, "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them,"† and punish them for the insult they are committing against Thee? And our Lord answered them, "You know not of what spirit you are;" meaning to say, "Know you not that we are no longer in the days of Elias, who had a spirit of severity; and though Elias was a very great servant of God, and did right in doing what you wish to do, you would nevertheless not do right in imitating him; inasmuch as I came not to punish and confound sinners, but to attract them sweetly to penance and to follow Me."

Now, let us see what is the particular spirit of a rule. To understand it better, we must give examples

* St. Luke, ix. 51. † Ibid. 54 and 55.

separate from ourselves, and afterwards we will return to ourselves. All religious and all devotional congregations have a spirit which is common to them, and each has one which is peculiar to itself. The common spirit is the intention they all have of aspiring to the perfection of charity; but the individual spirit is the means of attaining to this perfection of charity, that is to say, to the union of our soul with God, and with our neighbour for the love of God; which is made with God by the union of our will with His; and with our neighbour, by sweetness, which is a virtue immediately depending on charity. Let us come to this individual spirit, which is certainly very different in different orders. Some are united to God and to their neighbour by contemplation, and therefore keep in great solitude, conversing as little as possible with the world, and even with each other, except at certain times; they unite themselves also with their neighbour by means of prayer, by praying to God for him. On the contrary, the individual spirit of others is indeed to unite themselves to God and their neighbour, but it is by means of action, though it be spiritual; they unite themselves to God by reuniting their neighbour to Him, by study, by preaching, confessions, conferences, and other acts of piety; and they converse with the world that they may the better do this work for their neighbour. They do, indeed, also unite themselves to God by prayer; but, nevertheless, their principal end is that which we have just said—trying to convert souls and unite them to God. Others have a severe and rigorous spirit, with a perfect contempt of the world, and of all its vanities and sensualities, wishing to inspire men by their exam-

ple with this contempt for earthly things; and to this end serves the austerity of their habit and exercises. Others have another spirit; and it is very necessary to know what is the particular spirit of each religious and pious congregation. In order to know this well, we must consider the end for which it was begun, and the divers means of arriving at that end. There is, as I have said, a general one in all religious orders; but it is of the particular one that I am speaking, and to which we must have so great an affection, that we should embrace with all our heart everything that we can discover to be conformable to this end. Do you know what it is to love the end of our institute? It is to be exact in the observance of the means of arriving at this end, which are our rules and constitutions, and to be very diligent in doing all that depends upon them, and that serves to the more perfect observance of them; that is to have the spirit of our religion; but this exact and punctual observance must be undertaken in simplicity of heart; I mean that we must not wish to go beyond it by trying to do more than is marked out by our rules; for it is not by the multiplicity of things we do, that we acquire perfection, but by the perfection and purity of intention with which we do them. You must, then, look at the end of your institute and the intention of the founder, and dwell upon the means that are marked out for you to arrive at it. As to the end of your institute, it is not to be sought in the intention of the three first sisters who began it, any more than that of the Jesuits in the first design of St. Ignatius; for he had no thoughts of doing what he did afterwards, and the same is true of St. Francis, St. Dominic, and the

others who have founded religious orders. But God, to whom alone it belongs to make these pious congregations, has caused them to assume the form in which we see them; for we must never believe that a manner of life so perfect as that of religion was begun through man's invention. It was by God's inspiration that the rules were composed, which are the means of attaining the general end of all religious, the being united to God, and to our neighbour for the love of God. But as each religious order has its particular end, as well as the particular means of arriving at this general end and union, all have also a general way of arriving at it, which is by the three essential vows of religion. Every one knows that earthly goods and riches have powerful attractions to dissipate the soul, as well by the too great affection for them, as by the care necessary to keep and to increase them; for man never has enough of them to satisfy his desires. The religious cuts off and rids himself of all that by the vow of poverty. He does the same with the flesh and all its sensualities and pleasures, both lawful and unlawful, by the vow of chastity, which is a great means of uniting ourselves very specially to God; inasmuch as these sensual pleasures greatly slacken and weaken the strength of the spirit, dissipate the heart and the love we owe to God, and which we give entirely to Him by these means, not contenting ourselves with leaving our own earth, that is to say, renouncing the earthly pleasures of our flesh. But much more do we unite ourselves to God by the vow of obedience, by which we renounce our whole soul, all its powers, its will, and its affections, to submit and subject ourselves not only to the will of God, but to that

of our superiors, which we must always regard as being that of God Himself. And this is a very great renouncement, on account of the continual little desires produced by our self-love. Being, then, thus separated from all things, we retire into our inmost hearts to unite ourselves more perfectly to His Divine Majesty.

Now, to come in particular to the end for which our Congregation of the Visitation was erected, and to understand more easily what is the particular spirit of the Visitation, I have always judged that it was a spirit of profound humility towards God, and of great sweetness towards our neighbour; so that having less bodily austerity, there must be more sweetness of heart. All the ancient fathers have determined that where the sharpness of bodily mortification is wanting, there ought to be more perfection of spirit. Humility towards God, then, and gentleness towards our neighbour, must in your houses supply the place of the austerity of others; and though austerities are ways to arrive at perfection, and good in themselves, yet they would not be good with you, inasmuch as they would be against the rules. The spirit of sweetness is so much the spirit of the Visitation, that whoever would introduce into it more austerities than there now are, would immediately destroy the Visitation; inasmuch as it would be going against the end for which it was established, namely, to be able to receive infirm people who are not strong enough to undertake the austerities of other orders, or who are not inspired and attracted to serve God and unite themselves to Him by those means. You will perhaps say, "If it happens that a sister has a robust constitution, may she not practise more austerities than

the others with the permission of the superioress, so that the other sisters may not perceive it?" I answer that there is no secret which is not secretly communicated from one to another, and thus there arise orders within orders, and little parties, and then all is deranged. The blessed mother, St. Teresa, admirably describes the evil that is brought on by these little attempts to do more than the rule commands, and than the community does; and especially if it is done by the superioress, the evil will be greater. For as soon as ever her daughters are aware of it, they will immediately wish to do the same; and reasons will not be wanting to persuade themselves that they will be well able to do it, some being urged by zeal, others by the desire of pleasing her; and all that will be a temptation to those who are not able or willing to do the same.

We must never introduce, permit, or suffer these singularities in religion, except, however, in certain peculiar necessities, as, if a sister happened to be oppressed by some great trial or temptation; then it would not be extraordinary to ask leave from the superioress to do some penance more than the others; for they must act with the same simplicity as the sick in asking for remedies which they think likely to relieve them. But if a sister should be so generous and courageous as to want to arrive at perfection in a quarter of an hour, by doing more than the community, I should advise her to humble herself and submit to be perfect in three days, going on like the others. And if there should be sisters of strong and robust constitutions, so much the better, yet they must not want to go quicker than those who are weak. We have in Jacob

an admirable example well calculated to show how we should accommodate ourselves to the weak, and restrain our strength to bring ourselves to walk at their pace, especially when we are under obligation, as religious are, to follow the community in everything that is of perfect observance. Jacob, then, leaving the house of his father-in-law Laban, with his wives, his children, his servants and flocks, to return home, was in great fear of meeting his brother Esau, thinking he was still angry with him, though he no longer was. Being then on his journey, poor Jacob was very much afraid, for he met Esau, accompanied by a great troop of soldiers. Jacob, having saluted him, found him quite gentle towards him, for he said to him, My brother, "let us go on together, and I will accompany thee in thy journey." * To which the good Jacob answered, My lord and my brother, it shall not be so, if you please, because I have my children with me, and their little steps would try or abuse your patience. As for me, who am obliged to do it, I measure my steps by theirs; and also my ewes have young lambs which being tender could not go quickly, and all that would delay you too much. Observe, I beg of you, the gentleness of this holy patriarch. He willingly accommodates himself to the steps, not only of his little children, but also of his little lambs. He was on foot, and his journey was prosperous, as we plainly see by the blessings he received from God all the way; for he several times saw and spoke to angels and to the Lord of angels and men; and at last he had a better inheritance than his brother who was so well

* Genesis xxxiii. 12.

accompanied. If we wish our journeys to be blessed by the Divine Goodness, let us willingly submit ourselves to the exact and punctual observance of our rules, and that in simplicity of heart, not wishing to double the exercises; which would be going contrary to the intention of the Founder, and to the end for which the Congregation was formed. Let us then willingly accommodate ourselves to the weak who may be received into it, and I assure you that we shall not arrive at perfection any later for that; on the contrary it will even lead us there sooner; because not having much to do, we shall apply ourselves to doing it with the greatest possible perfection. And it is in this that our works are most pleasing to God; for He has regard, not to the multiplicity of things we do for His love, as we have already said, but chiefly to the fervour of the charity with which we do them. If I am not mistaken, I think that if we determine to observe our rules perfectly, we shall have enough to do, without undertaking more; since all that concerns the perfection of our state is comprised in them. The blessed mother St. Teresa says that her daughters were so exact that the superioresses were obliged to take very great care not to say anything but what it was very good to do; because without any other summons they began immediately to do it; and in order to observe their rules more perfectly, they were punctilious in the least little particular. She relates that once one of her daughters, not having quite understood something that a superioress had commanded, said to her that she did not understand it quite; and the superioress answered her rather sharply and inconsiderately: "Go and put your head into a well and you

will understand it." The sister was so prompt in going directly, that had she not been stopped, she would have thrown herself into a well. There is certainly less trouble in being exact in the observance of rules, than in trying to observe them only in part.

I cannot sufficiently insist on the importance of this point, of being punctual in the least thing that serves to the more perfect observance of the rule, as also of not wishing to undertake more under any pretext whatever; because it is the way to preserve an order in its integrity and its first fervour, and the contrary to it is what destroys it and makes it fall away from its first perfection. You will ask me if there would be more perfection in conforming to the community so completely as not even to ask leave to make an extraordinary Communion. Who can doubt it, my dear daughters, unless it be in certain cases, such as the feasts of our patron, or of a Saint to whom we have had a devotion all our life, or in some very pressing necessity. But as for certain little fervours that we sometimes have, which are transitory and for the most part the results of our natural disposition, when they make us desire Communion, we must not pay any attention to them, any more than mariners pay to a certain wind that rises at daybreak, produced by the vapours coming from the earth, and which does not last, but ceases as soon as those vapours are a little risen and dispersed; and therefore the pilot of the ship, who knows it, does not spread the sails to profit by this wind. In like manner we must not take for a good wind, that is to say, for an inspiration, all those little wishes that come to us, to ask sometimes to communicate, sometimes to meditate,

sometimes something else. For our self-love, which is always seeking its own satisfaction, would be quite content with all that, and would never cease to furnish us with new inventions. Today, when the community goes to Communion, it will suggest to you that you must, through humility, ask to abstain from it; when the time for humiliation comes, it will persuade you to rejoice and to ask for Communion for that purpose; and so it would never end. We must not take for inspiration the things that are out of the rule, except in cases so extraordinary that perseverance shows us that it is the will of God, as has been found with two or three great saints, whose directors wished them to communicate every day. I think it is a very great act of perfection to conform ourselves in everything to the community, and never to depart from it by our own choice; for besides being a very good way of uniting ourselves with our neighbour, it conceals our own perfection from ourselves. There is a certain simplicity of heart, in which consists the perfection of all perfections, and this simplicity makes our soul look to God alone, and keep itself recollected and shut up within itself, in order to apply itself with all possible fidelity to the observance of the rules, without dilating itself in desires or wishes to undertake more. It does not wish to do excellent and extraordinary things, which might gain it the esteem of creatures; and so it keeps itself very lowly and has no great satisfactions; it does nothing of its own will, and nothing more than the others; and thus all its holiness is hidden from its own sight. God alone sees it, who takes pleasure in the simplicity by which it wins His heart and unites itself to Him. It cuts

short all the inventions of self-love, which takes a sovereign delight in undertaking great and excellent things which make us esteemed beyond others. Such souls enjoy everywhere great peace and tranquillity of mind. We must never think nor suppose we have less merit in following the community and doing nothing more than the others. Oh, no! for perfection does not consist in austerities. Although they are good means of attaining to it, and though they are good in themselves, yet they are not good for us, because they are not conformable to our rules nor to the spirit of the rules; it being a greater perfection to remain in simple observance of them and to follow the community, than to wish to go beyond it. I assure you that she who shall keep within these limits, will make great progress in a short time, and will produce much fruit in her sisters by her example. In short, when we are rowing, we must do it by measure; those who row on the sea, are not so soon beaten by rowing rather slackly, as by not keeping time in their strokes. We should try to bring up the novices all alike, doing the same things, in order that they may row evenly; and if all do not do it with equal perfection, it cannot be helped; that is the case in all communities. But, you say, it is for mortification that you would remain a little longer in choir than the others on feast days, because the time has already seemed long to you during the two or three hours together that all have remained there. To this, I answer, that it is not a general rule that we must do everything to which we have a repugnance, any more than that we must abstain from those things for which we have an inclination. For if a sister has an inclina-

tion to say the holy Office, she must not refrain from assisting at it under pretext of wishing to mortify herself. For the rest, the time on feasts, which is left at liberty to do whatever one wishes, may be employed by each one according to her devotion; though, indeed, if you have been three hours or more in choir with the community, it is much to be feared that the quarter of an hour you remain there besides, may be a little morsel you will grant to your self-love.

In short, my dear daughters, we must love our rules very much, since they are the means by which we arrive at their end, which is to conduct us easily to the perfection of charity, that is to the union of our souls with God and with our neighbour: and not only that, but also to reunite our neighbour with God; which we do by the gentle and easy way we present to them; no one being rejected for want of bodily strength, provided she has the desire to live according to the spirit of the Visitation, which is, as I have said, a spirit of humility towards God, and of sweetness of heart towards our neighbour. And this spirit unites us both with God and our neighbour.

By humility we unite ourselves with God, submitting ourselves to the exact observance of His will which is signified to us in our rules: for we ought piously to believe that they were drawn up by His inspiration, being received by Holy Church, and approved by his Holiness, which are very evident signs of it: and therefore we ought to love them so much the more tenderly, and to press them to our breasts several times a day, in gratitude to God who gave them to us.

By sweetness of heart we unite ourselves with our

neighbour, by an exact and punctual conformity of life, of manners and of exercises, doing neither more nor less than those with whom we live, and than what is marked out for us in the path in which God has placed us together, employing and concentrating all the powers of our soul on doing it with all the perfection of which we are capable. But observe that what I have often said of the necessity of being very punctual in the observance of the rules and in the least little subjection, must not be understood to mean a scrupulous punctuality. Oh no! that was not my intention; but the punctuality of chaste spouses, who are not content with avoiding what would displease their Heavenly Spouse, but who wish to do all they can to be ever so little the more pleasing to Him.

It will be very appropriate if I set before you some remarkable example, to make you understand how pleasing it is to God to conform yourselves to the community in all things. Listen then to what I am going to say. Why, think you, did our Lord and His most holy Mother submit to the law of the Presentation and Purification, if not because of the love they bore the community? This example ought certainly to suffice to excite religious to follow their community exactly, without ever departing from it; for neither the Son nor the Mother were in any way bound by this law; not the Child, because He was God; not the Mother, because she was a most pure Virgin. They might easily have exempted themselves from it, without any one perceiving it. For might she not have gone to Nazareth, instead of going to Jerusalem? But she does not do so; she simply follows the community.

She might well have said: "The law was not meant for my beloved Son, nor for me; it does not bind us at all; but since the rest of mankind are bound by it and observe it, we very willingly submit to it, in order to conform ourselves to each of them and not to be singular in any thing." The Apostle St. Paul has well said that "it behoved our Lord in all things to be made like unto His brethren" * except sin. But, tell me, was it the fear of prevarication that rendered this Mother and her Son so exact in the observance of the law? certainly not, it was not that, for there could be no prevarication for them; they were attracted to it by the love they bore their Eternal Father. We could not love the commandment, if we did not love Him who gave it. In proportion as we love and esteem Him who made the law, we are exact in observing it. Some are attached to the law by chains of iron, and others by chains of gold. I mean that seculars who observe the commandments of God from fear of being lost, observe them by force and not from love. But religious, and those who aim at perfection, are attached to them by chains of gold, that is to say, by love: they love the commandments, and observe them lovingly; and in order to observe them better, they embrace the observance of the counsels. David says that God has commanded His commandments to be kept most diligently.† Do you see how much He desires that we should be punctual in observing them? Thus no doubt do all true lovers, avoiding not only the prevarication of the law, but even the shadow of it. For this reason the

* Hebrews ii, 17. † Ps. cxviii. 4.

Spouse says His spouse resembles a dove keeping beside gently flowing rivers, whose waters are transparent. You know well that the dove feels herself in safety by these waters, because she sees in them the shadow of the birds of prey that she fears; and as soon as she sees it, she takes to flight, and so cannot be surprised. Such is my beloved, the Sacred Spouse means to say; for while she flies from the shadow of prevarication in my commandments, she has no fear of falling into the hands of disobedience. He who by the vow of obedience voluntarily deprives himself of doing his own will in indifferent things, certainly shows sufficiently that he loves to submit in those which are necessary and of obligation. We must then be extremely punctual in the observance of the laws and rules given to us by our Lord, but above all in this point, of following the community in every thing: and we must take great care not to say that we are not bound to observe this particular rule or command of the superioress since it was given for the weak, and we are strong and robust; nor on the contrary, that the command was given for the strong, and that we are weak and infirm. O God! any thing but this in a community! I entreat you, if you are strong, to become weak that you may conform yourselves to the infirm; and if you are weak, I say, strive to adapt yourselves to the strong. The great Apostle St. Paul says: that he made himself all things to all men, that he might gain all. "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" * Who is sick, with whom I am not also sick? with the strong I am strong. See how St.

* II. Corinth. xi. 29.

Paul is weak when he is with the weak, and willingly takes the indulgences necessary for their weakness, in order to give them confidence to do the same: but when he finds himself with the strong, he is like a giant to give them courage; and if he perceives that his neighbour is scandalized at any thing he does, though lawful for him to do it, he has yet so much zeal for the peace and tranquillity of his heart, that he willingly refrains from it. But, you will say to me, "Now that it is the time for recreation, I have a very great desire to go and meditate, in order to unite myself more immediately with the Sovereign Goodness. May I not suppose that the law which orders recreation does not bind me, since I have naturally a very cheerful spirit?" Oh no! you must neither think nor say so. If you are not in want of recreation, you must nevertheless make recreation for those who are in want of it. "Are there then no exceptions in religion? Do the rules bind all equally?" Yes, no doubt; but there are laws that are justly unjust. For example, the fast of Lent is commanded for every one. Do not you think this law is unjust, since we moderate this unjust justice, giving dispensations to those who cannot observe it? It is the same in religion, the command is equally for all, and no one can dispense himself from it; but superiors moderate the rigour of it according to the necessity of each; and we must beware of thinking that the weak are more useless in religion than the strong, or that they do less, or have less merit, because all equally do the will of God. The bees give us an example of what we are saying; for some are employed in guarding the hive, and others are perpetually labouring to seek food; yet

those that stay in the hive do not eat less honey than those that have the trouble of going to gather it from the flowers. Does it not seem to you that David made an unjust law, when he ordered that the soldiers who guarded the baggage should have an equal share of the plunder with those who went to battle, and returned from it covered with wounds? No, it certainly was not unjust, inasmuch as those who guarded the baggage, guarded it for those who fought; and those who were in the battle fought for those who kept the baggage; so they all deserved the same reward, since they all equally obeyed the King.

CONFERENCE XIV.

PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

Against private judgment and tenderness towards oneself.

The first question is, whether to be subject to one's own opinion is very contrary to perfection. To which I answer, that to be subject to have opinions, or not to be so, is neither good nor bad; inasmuch as it is quite natural that every one should have his own opinions; but that does not prevent our attaining to perfection, provided we do not love them or become attached to them. For it is only the love of our own opinions which is infinitely contrary to perfection; and I have often said that our love and esteem of our own judgment are

the reason why there are so few perfect. There are many persons who renounce their own will, some on one point and some on another; I do not say only in religion, but among those in the world, and even in the courts of princes. If a prince gives a command to a courtier, he will never refuse to obey; but it seldom happens that he will allow the command to have been right. "I will do what you order me, in the manner you tell me," he will answer, but they always reserve themselves a *but*, which is as much as to say, they know very well that it would be better otherwise. No one can doubt, my dear daughters, that this is very contrary to perfection, for it usually produces uneasiness of mind, frivolity, murmuring, and lastly it nourishes the love of our own esteem; therefore neither our own opinion nor our own judgment ought to be loved or esteemed. But I must tell you that there are persons who ought to form their opinions, such as bishops, superiors who have the charge of others, and all those who govern; others ought by no means to do so, unless they are ordered by obedience; for otherwise they would lose the time they ought to employ in keeping themselves faithfully close to God; and as these would be considered inattentive to their perfection and uselessly occupied, if they were to dwell upon their own opinions, so superiors should be considered little fit for their office if they did not form opinions, and make resolutions, though they ought not to take pleasure in them or to be attached to them, which would be contrary to their perfection. The great St. Thomas, one of the greatest minds that could be, when he formed opinions, supported them by the strongest reasons he could find; nevertheless, if he met with anybody

who did not approve of what he thought to be right, or contradicted it, he did not dispute and was not offended, but bore it cheerfully, by which he showed clearly that he did not love his own opinion, though he did not disapprove of it. He left it thus; whether it was thought right or not, after he had done his duty, he had no anxiety about it. The Apostles were not attached to their own opinions, not even in things regarding the government of the Holy Church, which was a matter of such importance; and after they had determined the affair, by the resolution they had taken, they were not offended if people discussed it; and if some people refused to accept their opinions, though they were well-founded, they did not seek by disputes or contestations to make them be received. If, then, superiors were to change their opinion on all occasions, they would be thought careless and imprudent in their government; but if those who have no office were attached to their opinions, and sought to maintain them and have them received, they would be thought obstinate; for it is very certain that the love of one's own opinion degenerates into obstinacy, unless it is faithfully checked and mortified, as we see by the example even of the Apostles. It is a wonderful thing that our Lord permitted many things worthy of being recorded that were done by the holy Apostles, to remain hidden under profound silence; while the imperfection that the great St. Paul and St. Barnabas committed, is related; it is no doubt a special providence of our Lord, who willed it so for our particular instruction. They were going together to preach the Holy Gospel, and were taking with them a young man named John Mark, who was a relation of

St. Barnabas. These two great Apostles fell into a dispute whether they should take him or leave him; and being of contrary opinions on this point, and not being able to agree, they separated one from the other. Now, tell me, ought we to be disturbed at seeing a fault amongst us, since even the Apostles committed some?

There are in fact, certain clever people who are very good, but are so attached to their opinions, and who esteem them so highly, that they will never abandon them; and we must take great care not to ask their opinion unexpectedly, for it is almost impossible afterwards to make them see and confess that they were mistaken, since they go on searching so far for reasons to support what they have once advanced, that there is no way of inducing them to retract, unless they have given themselves up to an excellent degree of perfection. There are also some minds of great capacity, which are not subject to this imperfection, but who very readily give up their opinions. Though these may be very good, they do not take up arms in their defence when any opinion is brought forward contrary to that which they judge right and well-founded, as we have said of the great St. Thomas. Thus, we see it is natural to be attached to one's own opinion. Melancholy persons are usually more so than those of a joyous and gay temper; for the latter are easily guided, and ready to believe what is told them. The great St. Paula was obstinate in her opinion that she should practise great austerities, rather than submit to the counsel of many who advised her to abstain from them; and in the same way many other saints have thought it necessary to macerate the body exceedingly in order to please God, so that they

refused to obey the physician and to do what was required for the preservation of this mortal and perishable body. And although that was an imperfection, they did not fail on that account to be great saints, and very pleasing to God, which should teach us not to be troubled when we perceive in ourselves imperfections, or inclinations contrary to real virtue, provided we do not persist in them; for St. Paula and the others who were obstinate, though in little things, were reprehensible in that respect. With regard to ourselves, we must never allow our opinions to be so fixed that we would not willingly give them up when there is occasion, whether we are obliged to form them or not. It is, then, quite natural to be liable to esteem our own judgment, and therefore to plunge into the search after reasons to support what we have once taken up and thought right; but it would be a notable imperfection to give way and attach ourselves to it. Tell me, is it not losing time to no purpose, especially for those who have no office, to occupy themselves in this way?

You say, "What must we do then to mortify this inclination?" You must cut off its food. Does it come into your head that it is wrong to order a thing to be done in such a manner; and that it would be better as you have imagined it? Turn away from that thought, saying to yourself, Alas! what have I to do with that thing, since it is not confided to me? It is always much better to turn away from it simply in this manner, than to seek in our mind for reasons to persuade ourselves we are wrong; for our understanding, preoccupied with its own judgment, would deceive us; so that instead of destroying our opinion, it would

give us reasons for maintaining it, and insisting on its being right. It is always more effectual to despise it, without regarding it, and as soon as it is perceived, to drive it away so quickly that we do not know what it meant to say.

It is very true that we cannot prevent that first movement of complacency which comes over us when our opinion is approved and followed, for it cannot be avoided. But we must not amuse ourselves with this complacency; we must bless God, and then pass on, and not be disturbed at the complacency any more than at a little feeling of pain you would have, if your opinion were not followed or thought right. When we are required either by charity or by obedience to give our opinion on the subject in question, we must do it simply: but after that we must be indifferent whether it is received or not; we must even sometimes pronounce upon the opinions of others, and give the reasons on which our own are founded: but this must be done modestly and humbly, not despising the opinions of others, nor arguing to have our own received. You will, perhaps, ask whether it would not be encouraging this imperfection, if you sought afterwards to talk of it with those who were of your opinion, when it was already determined what should be done, and there was no longer any resolution to be taken. No doubt, that would be encouraging and pursuing our inclination, and consequently committing an imperfection; for it is a true sign that we have not submitted to the opinion of others, and that we still prefer our own. Therefore, when the thing which was proposed has been determined, we must neither speak nor think about it any

more, unless it should be a thing decidedly wrong; for in that case, if we could invent any means of preventing the execution of it or of remedying it, we must do so in the most charitable and imperceptible manner we can, so as not to vex any one, nor to despise what they have approved. The sole and only remedy for private judgment is to neglect what comes into our thoughts, and to apply ourselves to something better. For if we allow ourselves to attend to all the opinions it will suggest to us on various occasions, what will follow but a continual distraction and hindering of things more useful and tending to our perfection, which will render us weak and incapable of making holy prayer? For having given liberty to our spirit to amuse itself with considering such fancies, it will plunge itself deeper and deeper, and will produce thoughts upon thoughts, opinions upon opinions, and reasons upon reasons, which will be wonderfully importunate in our prayer; for prayer is nothing else but a total application of our mind with all its faculties to God. And if it is spent in the pursuit of useless things, it will have so much the less facility and fervour in the consideration of the mysteries on which we wish to make our prayer. This, then, is what I had to say to you on the subject of the first question, by which we have been taught that it is not contrary to perfection to have opinions, but that it is so to love and consequently to esteem our own opinions. For if we did not esteem them, we should not be so fond of them; and if we were not fond of them, we should hardly care whether they were approved, and we should not be so ready to say: "Others may think what they please, but as for me....." Do you know the

meaning of this *as for me?* Nothing else but this, "I will not submit, I shall keep firm in my resolution and in my opinion." This is, as I have often said, the last thing that we give up; and, nevertheless, it is one of the things most necessary to be given up and renounced for the acquisition of true perfection; for otherwise we shall not acquire holy humility, which prevents and forbids our having any esteem for ourselves, or for anything depending on us; and if we do not hold the practice of this virtue in great honour, we shall always think ourselves better than we are, and moreover, that something is due to us from others. And now enough has been said on this subject.

If you ask me nothing more, we will pass on to the second question, which is, whether our tenderness towards ourselves hinders us much on our road to perfection; and for the better understanding of this, I must remind you of what you know very well, that we have in us two kinds of love, affective and effective; and that not only in the love we have for God, but also for our neighbour and even for ourselves. But we will speak only of that for our neighbour, and afterwards return to ourselves. Theologians have been accustomed, in order to explain the difference between these two loves, to employ the comparison of a father who has two sons, of whom one is a little darling and very engaging, still quite a child, and the other is a grown up man, a brave and generous soldier, or in any other profession you please. The father greatly loves these two sons, but with a different love; for he loves the little one with an extremely tender and affective love. Pray look, what does he not permit this little pet to do

with him? he nurses it, he kisses it, he holds it in his arms and on his knees, with the greatest delight to the child as well as himself; if this child has been stung by a bee, he never gives over blowing upon the place till the pain is relieved. If his eldest son had been stung by a hundred bees, he would not deign to stir a foot, though he loves him with a very strong and solid love. Consider, if you please, the difference of these two loves; for although you have seen the tenderness of this father for his little child, he does not the less intend to send him away from home and make him a knight of Malta, destining his eldest son to be his heir and successor to his property. The latter, then, is loved with effective love, and the other, the little one, with affective: both are loved, but differently. Our love for ourselves is in this way affective and effective; effective love is that which governs the great, who are ambitious of honours and riches; they procure themselves as much property as they can, and are never satisfied with what they have; they love themselves greatly with this effective love. But there are others who love themselves more with affective love; and they are those who are very tender to themselves, and never do anything but nurse and pity and take care of themselves, and are so afraid of anything that may hurt them, that it is quite pitiful. If they are ill, nobody is so ill as they are, they say; they are so miserable; no illness, however severe, was ever to be compared to what they suffer, and one cannot find doctors enough to cure them; they never give over taking medicine, and thinking to preserve their health, they entirely lose and ruin it. If others are ill, it is nothing; in short they are the only people to be pitied,

and they weep tenderly over themselves, and try to move those they meet with to compassion. They do not much care whether they are thought patient, provided they are thought very ill and afflicted; imperfections certainly belonging to children, and if I may venture to say so, to women, and again among men, to those who are effeminate and of little courage; for among the generous, this imperfection is not met with. Strong minds do not rest upon these foolish and sickly tendernesses, which can only stop us on our road to perfection; and besides that, is it not a sign that we are very tender, if we cannot bear to be considered so?

I remember a case in point, when I was at a religious house on my return from Paris; and I certainly found more consolation in this incident than I had had in all my journey, though I had met with many very virtuous souls; but this consoled me above all. There was in this house a postulant who was wonderfully gentle, tractable, submissive, and obedient; she had in short the qualities most necessary for becoming a true religious. At length it happened, unfortunately, that the sisters observed in her a bodily infirmity, which made them begin to doubt whether she ought not to be sent away on account of it. The mother superior loved her very much, and was very sorry to do it; but yet the sisters laid great stress on this bodily inconvenience. Now, when I was there, the question was referred to me about this poor good girl, who is of good family; she was brought before me, and kneeling down she said, "It is true, my Lord, that I have such an imperfection, which is very discreditable (naming it aloud with great simplicity.) I confess that our sisters are

quite right in wishing not to receive me; for I am insupportable in my defect; but I entreat you to be favourable to me, assuring you that if they exercise their charity towards me and receive me, I will take great care not to incommode them, submitting willingly to work in the garden, or take any other office whatever it may be, that will keep me away from their company, in order that I may not inconvenience them." This postulant certainly touched me. Oh! how far she was from being tender to herself! I could not refrain from saying that I would willingly have the same natural defect, and have the courage to speak of it before all the world with the same simplicity as she did before me. She was not so afraid of being in disesteem as many are, and was not so tender to herself; she did not indulge in all these vain and useless considerations. "What will the superioress say, if I tell her this or that? If I ask her for some indulgence, she will say or think I am very tender." Well, if it is true, why do not you wish her to think so? "But when I tell her what I want, she looks at me so coldly that I think she does not like it." It is very possible, my dear daughter, that the superioress, having plenty of other things on her mind, may not always be careful to smile, or speak very graciously, when you tell her your pain; and that is what annoys you, you say, and takes away your confidence in going to tell her of your indispositions. O God! my dear daughters, this is being childish; you must go simply. If the superioress or the mistress have not received you so well as you would wish, once, or even several times, still you must not be annoyed, or suppose that they will always do the same.

Oh, no! Our Lord will, perhaps, touch them with His spirit of sweetness, to make them more amiable next time. But then we must not be so tender as to want always to speak of all the inconveniences we have, when they are not of importance; a little headache or a little toothache, which will perhaps soon be over, if you will bear it for the love of God, there is no occasion to go and tell it to get yourself a little pity. Perhaps you will not tell it to the superioress, nor to her who can give you relief, but more readily to others; because you say, you wish to bear it for God. Oh, my dear daughter! if it were true that you wished to bear it for the love of God, as you think, you would not go and tell it to another, who you know very well will feel herself obliged to inform the superioress of your sickness, and by this means, you will obtain, in a roundabout way, the relief that, in real truth, you would have done better to ask for simply from her who could give you leave to have it; for you knew very well that the sister whom you told you had a headache, had not the power to tell you to go to bed. It is not done, then, with any other design or intention (though you may not actually think of it) than that of being a little pitied by this sister; and that does great good to our self-love. Now, if it is by accident that you say it, perhaps because the sisters ask you how you are at that moment, there is no harm in it, provided you say it quite simply without exaggerating or complaining; but in any other case, you should say it only to the superioress or to the mistress. Neither must you be afraid, though they may be rather strict in correcting such a fault. Go quite simply and tell them of your ailment. I can well

believe that you speak of it with more pleasure and confidence to one who has not the charge of making you take remedies, than to her who has that care and that power; for when you do so, every one pities sister such a one, and sets about providing remedies: instead of which if you told it to the sister who has charge of you, you would have to submit to do whatever she ordered; whereas we always avoid with our whole heart, this blessed subjection, because our self-love seeks to let us govern ourselves and be the masters of our own will. "But," you say, "if I tell the superioress that I have a headache, she will tell me to go to bed." Well! what matter? If you are not ill enough for that, it will not be difficult to say to her, "Mother," or, "Sister, I do not think I am bad enough for that." And if after that she still says you must, you will go simply; for we must observe great simplicity in all things. Walk simply, that is the true way of the daughters of the Visitation, which is very safe and very pleasing to God. But if you see a sister who having some trouble of mind, or some ailment, has not confidence and courage to come and tell you of it, and you perceive that, for want of doing so, she is falling into sadness, ought you to invite her, or to let her come of herself? In this case we must be governed by prudence; for sometimes we must condescend to their weakness by calling them and enquiring what is the matter; and at other times we must mortify these little fancies by disregarding them: as if one were to say, You will not overcome yourself and ask for the proper remedy for your ailment; very well then, you must bear it, for that is what you deserve.

This tenderness is much more intolerable in spiritual than in bodily concerns; and yet unfortunately, it is most practised and indulged in by spiritual persons, who want to be holy at once, without its costing them any thing, not even the endurance of the struggles of the inferior part against things contrary to nature; nevertheless, whether we will or no, we must have courage to endure and consequently to resist these efforts many times during our whole lives, if we do not wish to make shipwreck of the perfection we have undertaken to attain. I very much desire that we should always distinguish the effects of the superior part of our soul from those of the inferior part, and that we should never be dismayed at the results produced by the inferior, however bad they may be; for they have not the power to stop us on our road, provided we keep firmly to the superior part, always advancing in the way of perfection, without amusing ourselves and losing our time in complaining that we are imperfect and worthy of compassion; as if people were to do nothing but pity our misery and misfortune, in being so slow in accomplishing our end. That good sister of whom we spoke was not the least touched in speaking to me of her defect; she told it me with great firmness of heart and manner, by which she pleased me the more. Some of us are very fond of weeping over our faults; that is such a comfort to our self-love. We must, my dear daughters, be very generous, and nowise astonished to see ourselves subject to a thousand sorts of imperfections, and yet we must be very courageous in despising our inclinations, humours, fancies and softnesses, mortifying them all faithfully on every occasion. And if we

still fall into these faults now and then, let us not stop on that account; but let us revive our courage to be more faithful the next opportunity, and pass on, making progress in the way of God and in renouncing ourselves. You ask again what you must do if the superioress seeing you more sad than usual, asks you what is the matter, and you cannot say what it is because you find many things in your mind that trouble you. You must say it in this way simply: "I have several things on my mind, but I do not know which it is." You are afraid, you say, that the superioress will think you have not confidence in her. Now why should you care what she thinks or does not think, provided you do your duty? What do you trouble yourself about? That "What will they say if I do this or that?" or, "What will the superioress think of it?" is very contrary to perfection, when we dwell upon it: for we must always remember in all that I say, that I do not mean to speak of what is done by the inferior part, for I make no account of it. It is then to the superior part that I say, we must despise these "What will they say?" or, "what will they think?" This comes upon you when you have made your manifestation, because you did not say enough about particular faults; you fancy, you say, that the superioress will say or think that you do not wish to tell her everything: it is the same with manifestation as with confession. We must be as simple in the one as in the other. Now tell me, ought we to say, "If I confess such a thing, what will my confessor say, or what will he think of me?" By no means. He will think and say whatever he pleases; it is enough for me that he has given me absolution, and

that I have performed my duty. And as after confession it is not the time to examine ourselves, whether we have really told all we have done, but it is the time to keep ourselves in attention and tranquillity near our Lord, with whom we have reconciled ourselves, and to give Him thanks for His benefits, it being quite unnecessary to seek after what we may have forgotten; so is it after having made your manifestation. We must say quite simply what occurs to us; afterwards, we must think no more of it. But also, as we should not go to confession well prepared, if we would not examine ourselves, for fear of finding something that ought to be confessed, so we must not neglect to enter into ourselves before our manifestation, for fear of finding something that it would give us pain to speak of. Nor must we be so tender in wishing to tell everything, nor have recourse to superiors, to cry out at every little trouble we feel, which will perhaps be over in a quarter of an hour. We must learn to be more generous in suffering these little things which we cannot remedy, they being usually the results of our imperfect nature; as are those varieties of humours, of wishes and desires, which produce sometimes a little sadness, sometimes a desire to talk, and then suddenly a great aversion to doing it, and such things, to which we are subject and shall be while we live in this perishable and passing life. But as to that uneasiness which you say you have, and which prevents your keeping yourself attentive to God, unless you go directly and tell the superioress of it, I say that you must observe that perhaps it does not deprive you of attention to the presence of God, but of the sweetness of that attention. Now, if this is all, if you have indeed as you say,

courage and good will to suffer it without seeking relief, I say that you will be very right in doing so, though it may give you a little disquiet, provided it is not too great; but if it prevented your keeping near to God, you must immediately go and tell it to the superioress, not for the sake of relieving yourself, but of gaining ground in the presence of God, though there would be no great harm in doing it for the sake of relief. For the rest, our sisters must not be so attached to the caresses of the superioress, that the moment she does not speak to them as they like, they conclude it is because she does not love them. Oh no! our sisters are too fond of humility and mortification to be downcast in future on a slight suspicion, (which is perhaps without foundation) that they are not as much beloved as their self-love makes them desire to be. "But," some one will say, "I have committed a fault against the superioress, and therefore I am apprehensive that she will be offended with me, and in a word that she will not think so well of me as she did."

My dear sisters, all these annoyances happen to us by command of a certain spiritual father, called self-love, who begins to say, "What! after such a fault, what will our mother say or think of me? Oh! no good must ever be expected from me, I am a poor wretch; I shall never be able to do anything that can please our mother," and such fine lamentations. One does not say, "Alas! I have offended God; I must have recourse to His goodness, and hope that He will strengthen me." One says, "Oh! I know well that God is good, He will not have regard to my unfaithfulness; He knows our infirmities too well, but our

mother—;" we always return to that to continue our lamentations. We must no doubt take care to please our superiors, for the great apostle St. Paul declares it and exhorts to it, speaking to servants, and it may also be applied to children; "Serve," said he, "your masters to the eye," meaning, take great pains to please them. But he also says afterwards, "Do not serve your masters to the eye," meaning that they should take great care to do nothing less in the absence of their masters than they would do in their presence, because the Eye of God always sees them; and we ought to have great respect for It, doing nothing that could displease Him; and doing this, we should not disturb or trouble ourselves much about pleasing men, for it is not in our power. Let us do the best we can not to displease any body, but after that, if it should happen that through your weakness you do sometimes displease people, have recourse immediately to the doctrine that I have so often preached to you, and wish so much to engrave on your minds; humble yourselves at once before God, acknowledging your frailty and weakness; and then repair your fault, if it deserves it, by an act of humility towards the person whom you have annoyed; and that being done, never be disturbed, for our spiritual father, who is the love of God, forbids it, and teaches us that after we have made the act of humility, as I have said, we are to enter into ourselves, in order to caress tenderly and affectionately the blessed abjection which comes from having failed, and the beloved reproof which the superioress will give us. We have two loves, two judgments, and two wills; and therefore we must take no account of anything that is suggested to us by self-

love, by our private judgment, or our own will, provided we make the love of God reign over self-love, and the judgment of superiors, and even of inferiors and equals, over our own, reducing it to the smallest footing, not content with subduing our will, by doing all that is desired of us; but also subduing our judgment to believe that we have no reason to think it is not justly and reasonably done; thus absolutely annulling the reasons it would bring forward to persuade us that the thing commanded would be better done otherwise than as we are told to do it. We must simply give our reasons once, if they seem to us to be good; but after that we must acquiesce without farther reply in what we are told, and thus sacrifice our judgment which we esteem so wise and prudent above every other. Good God! mother, our sisters are so resolved to love mortification, that it will be a pleasure to see them; consolation will be nothing to them compared to affliction, dryness, or repugnance, so desirous are they to resemble their Spouse. Assist them, then, well in their undertaking, mortify them well and boldly, without sparing them; for this is what they ask; they will no longer be attached to caresses, since that is contrary to the generosity of their devotion, which will henceforth lead them to attach themselves so absolutely to the desire of pleasing God, that they will no longer seek anything but what is likely to forward the accomplishment of this desire. It is the sign of a tender heart and of an effeminate devotion, to give way on every little occasion of contradiction. Do not be afraid that these follies of a sad and spiteful humour will ever exist amongst us; we have too much good courage, thank God. We will

apply ourselves in future to do so much that it will be quite a delight to see us. Meanwhile, my dear daughters, let us purify our intention well, in order that, doing all for God, for His honour and glory, we may expect our reward from Him alone. His love will be our recompense in this life, and He Himself will be our reward in eternity.

CONFERENCE XV.

THE WILL OF GOD.

In which it is asked in what consists the perfect determination to regard and to follow the will of God in all things; and whether we can find and follow it in the wills of our superiors, equals, or inferiors, which we see proceed from their natural or habitual inclinations. And on some notable points concerning confessors and preachers.

You must know that the determination to follow the will of God in all things, without exception, is contained in the Lord's Prayer, in these words which we say every day: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." There is no resistance to the will of God in heaven; everything is subject and obedient to Him; thus, we say, may it happen to us, and thus we ask our Lord to arrange, never offering any resistance, but remaining always very submissive and obedient in all occurrences to the Divine will. But souls thus determined require to be instructed how they may recognise the will of God. Of this I have very clearly

spoken in the book of the love of God; nevertheless, I will say something more to satisfy the inquiry that has been made of me. The will of God may be understood in two ways. There is the will of God signified, and the will of His good pleasure. The signified will is divided into four parts, which are, the commandments of God and of the Church, counsels, inspirations, rules and constitutions. The commandments of God and of the Church every one must necessarily obey, because it is the absolute will of God that we should obey them if we would be saved. His counsels He wills that we should observe, not with an absolute will, but only in the manner of desire; therefore we do not lose charity, nor separate ourselves from God, when we have not the courage to undertake obedience to counsels; we ought not even to wish to undertake the practice of all, but only of those that are the most in conformity with our vocation; for some of them are so opposed to each other, that it would be quite impossible to embrace the practice of the one, without taking away the means of practising the other. It is a counsel to leave everything in order to follow our Lord stripped of all things; it is a counsel to lend and to give alms. Tell me, how can he give alms who has all at once quitted everything he had, since he has nothing? We must then follow the counsels which God wills we should follow, and not suppose that He has given them all in order that we should embrace them all. Now, the counsels that we ourselves must practise, are those which are comprised in our rules.

We have also said that God signifies to us His will by inspiration; it is true, but yet He does not will that we

should discern for ourselves whether what is inspired be His will, still less that we should follow His inspirations at random. Nor does He wish us to wait till He Himself manifests His will to us, or till He sends Angels to teach it us. But His will is that we should have recourse in doubtful and important things, to those whom He has placed over us to guide us, and that we should remain entirely in subjection to their advice and to their opinion, in what concerns the perfection of our souls. This, then, is the way that God shows us His will, which we call signified will. There is also the will of the good pleasure of God, which we must regard in all events, I mean, in everything that happens to us in sickness, in death, in affliction, in consolation, in adversity, and prosperity, in short, in all things that are not foreseen. And to this will of God we must always be ready to submit ourselves in all occurrences, in pleasant as in unpleasant things, in death as in life, in short in all that is not clearly against the signified will of God, for that takes the precedence, and in this we answer the second part of the question. To make you understand this better, I must tell you that I have been reading the last few days the life of the great St. Anselm, where it is related that during all the time he was prior and abbot of his monastery, he was extremely beloved by every one; because he was very condescending, bending to the wishes of all, not only of the religious, but also of strangers. Some one came and said to him, "Father, your reverence ought to take a little broth," and he took some. Another came and said to him, "Father, that will do you harm," and he directly left it. Thus he submitted in everything that did not

offend God, to the will of his brothers, who no doubt followed their own inclinations; but still more particularly the seculars, who also made him turn in all directions, at their pleasure. Now, this great pliancy and condescension of the saint was not approved by all, though he was very much beloved by all; so that one day some of his brethren wanted to point out to him that this was not according to their judgment, and that he ought not to be so yielding and condescending to every body's wishes, but that he ought to make those of whom he had the charge bend to his will. "O, my children, replied the great saint, "perhaps you do not know with what intention I do it. Know, then, that remembering our Lord's command that we should do to others what we wish to be done to ourselves, I cannot do otherwise; for I wish that God should do my will, and therefore I willingly do that of my brothers and neighbours, in order that it may please our good God sometimes to do mine. Besides, I have also this consideration, that after God's own signification of His will to me, I can have no better or more secure means of ascertaining His good pleasure, than by the voice of my neighbour; for God does not speak to me, still less does He send Angels to declare to me what is His good pleasure. The stones, animals, plants do not speak, it is only man that can make known to me the will of my God, and therefore I attach myself to this as much as I can. God enjoins me charity towards my neighbour; it is a great charity to keep ourselves in union with each other; I know no better way of doing this than by being gentle and condescending; a sweet and humble condescension should always preside over

all our actions. But my principal consideration is the belief that God manifests His will to me by that of my brothers, and therefore I obey God whenever I yield to them in everything. Besides that, has not our Lord said that if we did not become like little children, we should not enter into the kingdom of heaven? Do not be surprised then if I am as gentle and yielding as a child, since I am thus doing what my Saviour has commanded me. It is not of much consequence whether I go to bed or remain up, whether I go there or stay here; but there would be great imperfection in not submitting to my neighbour in these things."

Do you see, my dear sisters, how the great St. Anselm submits himself to everything that is not against the commandments of God or of Holy Church, or against the rules; for obedience to them always takes precedence. If he had been desired to do anything against them, I do not think he would have done it. Oh! certainly not; but except that, his general rule was to condescend in everything and to all, in these indifferent things. The glorious St. Paul, after having said that nothing should separate him from the charity of God, neither life nor death, nor even the Angels, nor all hell if it combined against him would have the power; says, "I know nothing better than to render myself all things to all men, to rejoice with them that rejoice, to weep with them that weep, and, in short, to make myself one with each one."

As St. Pacomius was one day making mats, a child, looking at what the saint was doing, said to him, "Oh, father, you are not doing it well, that is not the way it should be done." The great saint, though he made

those mats very well, nevertheless got up directly, and went to sit down near the child, who showed him how to do it. There was a religious, who said to him, "Father, you are doing two wrong things by yielding to the will of this child, for you expose him to the danger of vanity, and you spoil your mats, for they were better as you were making them." To whom the blessed father answered, "Brother, if God permits the child to be vain, He will perhaps in return give me humility, and I can afterwards give some to this child." There is not much danger in twisting the reeds this way or that, to make the mats; but there would be great danger, if we did not bear in mind that celebrated word of our Saviour, "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* Oh, how good it is, my sisters, to be thus pliable and easily turned in any direction!

Not only have the saints taught us this practice of the submission of our will, but also our Lord Himself, as well by word as by example. But how by word? What is the counsel of self-abnegation, but the renouncing on every occasion our own will and our own judgment, to follow the will of others, and to submit to all, except always in that which might offend God? You might say, "I see clearly that what I am desired to do proceeds from a human will and a natural inclination, and therefore God has not inspired my mother or my sister to order it." No, perhaps God has not inspired her, but He has inspired you to do it; and by failing to do it you run counter to the determination to

* St. Matthew, xviii. 3.

do the will of God in all things, and consequently to the care you ought to take of your perfection. In order, then, to do the will of God, we must always submit to do all that is required of us, provided it be not contrary to His will, which He has signified to us in the manner mentioned above.

Now, to say a word about the will of creatures, it may be taken in three ways; by way of affliction, by way of complaisance, or else when unreasonable or unseasonable. In the first we must be very strong, to embrace willingly those wills so contrary to our own, which does not like to be contradicted; and usually we have to suffer much in this practice of following the wills of others, which are for the most part different from ours. We must, then, receive by way of suffering the execution of such wills, and make use of these daily contradictions to mortify ourselves, accepting them with love and sweetness, by way of complaisance. There is no need of exhortation to make us obey in things that are agreeable, for we do it very readily; we are even beforehand with these wills, and offer them our submission. Nor is it to this sort of will that we ask whether we must submit, for we have no doubt about it; but to those which are unseasonable, and of which we do not know the reasons why they are required of us; there is the profit. "For why should I do the will of my sister rather than my own? Is not my own in this trifling matter as conformable to the will of God as hers? What reason have I to think that what she tells me to do, is an inspiration of God, rather than the wish I have to do something else?" O God! my dear sisters, it is here that the Divine Majesty would have us gain the merit

of submission; for if we always saw very plainly that others were right in ordering us or asking us to do such a thing, we should not have great merit or great repugnance in doing it, because in that case no doubt our whole soul would willingly acquiesce. But when the reasons are hidden from us, it is then that our will is reluctant, that our judgment resists, and resents the contradiction. Now, it is on these occasions that we must overcome ourselves, and with a child like simplicity set to work without remark or reasoning, and say, "I know very well that the will of God is that I should do the will of my neighbour rather than my own; and therefore I put it in practice, without thinking whether it is the will of God that I should submit to do what proceeds from passion and inclination, or whether it is truly by an inspiration or by a movement of reason;" for in all these little things we must walk in simplicity. What sense would there be, I ask, in making an hour's meditation to discover whether it is the will of God that I should drink when I am asked, or that I should abstain from it out of penance or temperance, and such little things which are not worthy of consideration, especially if I see that I should please my neighbour ever so little by doing them? As to things of consequence, we must not lose time in considering them either, but we must address ourselves to our superiors, in order to learn from them what we are to do; after which we must think no more of it, but rest absolutely on their opinion, since God has given them to us for the guidance of our souls in the perfection of His love. If we ought thus to yield to the will of every one, much more ought we to do so to that of our

superiors, whom we should hold and esteem as the person of God Himself among us, for they are His vicegerents. For this reason, even if we knew that they had natural inclinations, or even passions, by the movements of which they might sometimes command or reprove the faults of their inferiors, we must not be at all astonished; for they are men like the rest, and consequently liable to have inclinations and passions; but we are not permitted to form a judgment whether the command they give us proceeds from their passion or inclination, and it is a thing which we must carefully guard against doing. Indeed, even if we knew distinctly that it was so, we must not fail to obey sweetly and lovingly, and to submit with humility to the correction. It is certainly very hard to our self-love, to be subject to these contradictions; that is true, but then it is not that love that we ought to satisfy and listen to, but only the holy Love of our souls, Jesus, who asks of His dear spouses a holy imitation of the perfect obedience which He rendered not only to the most just and holy will of His Father, but also to that of His parents, and what is more, of His enemies, who no doubt followed their passions in the sufferings they imposed upon Him; and yet our good Jesus does not fail to submit to them sweetly, humbly, and lovingly. And we can easily see that these words of our Lord, ordering us to take up our cross, should be understood of receiving willingly the contradictions we meet with on all occasions, through holy obedience, though they may be trifling and of little importance.

I am now going to give you another admirable example to make you understand the value of small crosses,

that is to say, of obedience, condescension, and pliability in following the will of every one, but especially of superiors. St. Gertrude was a religious in a monastery, the superioress of which knew very well that the blessed Saint was of a weak and delicate constitution. Therefore she treated her more tenderly than the other religious, not letting her practise the austerities that were customary in that order. What do you think the poor sister did, to become a Saint? Nothing more than simply submit to the will of the mother; and though fervour would have made her desire to do what the others did, yet she never let it appear; for when she was ordered to go to bed, she went simply without reply, being assured that she would by obedience enjoy the presence of her Spouse as well in her bed, as if she had been in choir with her sisters and companions. And as a proof of the great peace and tranquillity of soul that she acquired by this practice, our Lord revealed to St. Mecthildis her companion that if any one wished to find Him in this life, He must be sought first in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, and then in the heart of St. Gertrude. We need not be surprised at this, since the Spouse says in the Canticle of Canticles that the place where He reposes is in the sunshine of mid-day. He does not say that He reposes in the evening or the morning, but in the mid-day, because at mid-day there is no shade. And the heart of this great Saint was a true mid-day, where there was no shadow of scruple nor of self-will; and therefore her soul fully enjoyed her Beloved, who took delight in her. In short obedience is the salt which gives taste and savour to all our actions, and makes them merit eternal life.

I wish also, today, to say two or three words about confession. First, I wish that great honour should be paid to confessors, for (besides our being bound to honour the priesthood) we ought to regard them as Angels, whom God sends to us to reconcile us with His Divine Goodness; and not only that, but we should also regard them as the vicegerents of God on earth; and therefore, although they might sometimes happen to show themselves to be men by committing some imperfections, such as asking something out of curiosity, which did not concern the confession, as your names, whether you practise virtues, and what they are, whether you do penance, whether you have any temptations, and such things; I would answer according to what is asked, though we are not obliged to do so; for you must not say to them that you are not permitted to tell them anything else besides what you have accused yourselves of. Oh, no! you must never make that excuse, for it is not true; you may say anything you please in confession, provided you speak only of what relates to yourself in particular, and not to your sisters in general. But if you are afraid to speak of something that you are asked about for fear of embarrassing yourself, as might happen if you said you had temptations; if you feared to tell them, lest they should wish to know them in detail, you might answer, "I have some, Father, but, by the grace of God, I do not think I have offended His goodness by them." But never say that you have been forbidden to confess this or that. Tell your confessor in good faith all that may give you uneasiness, if you wish; but I tell you again, take great care not to speak of any other person.

In the second place, we have a sort of reciprocal obligation towards our confessors in the act of confession, to keep concealed what they have told us, unless it were something edifying, and except in that case it must not be spoken of. If it happens that they give you some advice against your rules and manner of life, listen to them with humility and reverence; and then do what your rules permit, and nothing else. Confessors have not always the intention of obliging you under pain of sin to what they tell you. You must receive their counsels by way of simple direction, yet hold in esteem and pay great attention to what is said to you in confession, for you can hardly imagine the great profit that may be derived from this sacrament by souls that come to it with the requisite humility. If they were to give you as a penance anything that would be against the rule, beg them very gently to change this penance for another, because it being against the rule, you would be afraid of scandalising your sisters if you performed it. For the rest, you must never complain of your confessor. If through his fault anything happened to you in confession, you might simply say to the superioress that you would wish, if she pleased, to confess to some one else, without saying anything more; for by doing this, you will not discover the imperfection of the confessor, and you will have the convenience of confessing as you like. But this must not be done lightly and for trifling reasons. We must avoid extremes; for as it is not good to tolerate notable faults in confession, so, on the other hand, we must not be too delicate to bear with small ones.

Thirdly, I should much wish our sisters to take great

pains to particularize their sins in confession; I mean that those who have not observed anything requiring absolution, should mention some particular sin. For it is not to the purpose to say that we accuse ourselves of having had several emotions of anger, of sadness, and so of the rest; for anger and sadness are passions, and their emotions are not sins, inasmuch as it is not in our power to prevent them. The anger must be unruly, or lead us to unruly actions, to be a sin. You must then particularize something which involves sin. I should, moreover, much wish you to take great care to be very truthful, simple, and charitable in confession (truthful and simple are the same thing), to tell your faults very clearly without dissimulation, without artifice, remembering that it is to God we are speaking, from Whom nothing can be concealed; and to be very charitable, not in any way bringing your neighbour into your confession. For example, when you have to confess that you have murmured within yourself, or to the sisters, because the superioress spoke to you too harshly, do not go and say that you have murmured at her correction being too rough, but simply that you have murmured against the superioress. Tell only the evil you have done, and not the cause which urged you to it; and never either directly or indirectly discover the faults of others, in exposing your own; and never give the confessor any reason to suspect who it is that has contributed to your sin.

Do not bring into your confession any useless accusations. You have had imperfect thoughts about your neighbour, thoughts of vanity, or even worse ones; you have had distractions in your prayers; if you have dwelt

upon them deliberately, say so honestly, and do not content yourself with saying that you have not taken sufficient care to keep yourself recollected during the time of prayer; but if you have been negligent in dismissing a distraction, say so, for those general accusations are to no purpose in confession.

I should also very much wish, my dear daughters, that in this house great honour should be paid to those who announce to you the word of God. We are certainly under great obligation to do this, for they seem to be heavenly messengers sent by God to teach us the way of salvation. We must look upon them as such, and not as mere men; for though they may not speak as well as heavenly men, still we must abate nothing of the humility and reverence with which we ought to receive the word of God, which is always the same, as pure, as holy as if it were uttered by angels. I observe that when I write to a person on bad paper, and consequently in a bad hand, he thanks me with as much affection as when I write on better paper and in a better hand. Why so? Because he pays no attention to the paper which is not good, nor to the handwriting which is bad, but only to me who write to him. In the same manner we must treat the word of God; not regarding who it is that brings it, or who it is that declares it to us; it should be enough for us that God makes use of that preacher to teach us. And since we see that God honours him so much as to speak by his mouth, how could we fail to honour and respect his person?

CONFERENCE XVI.

AVERSIONS.

Concerning aversions; how we should receive books; and that we should not be astonished to see imperfections in religious persons, and even in superiors.

The first question is, what is aversion? Aversions are certain inclinations that are sometimes natural, which make us feel a certain repugnance to meeting those towards whom we have it, which prevents our liking their conversation; we take no pleasure in it, as we should in that of persons towards whom we have a sweet inclination which makes us love them with a sensible love, because there is a certain alliance and correspondence between our minds and theirs. Now, to show that it is natural to love some persons through inclination and not others, do we not see that if two men go into a tennis-court, where two others are playing at tennis, those who come in will immediately wish that one should win rather than the other. How is this? since they have never seen either, nor even heard of them, and do not know whether one is more virtuous than the other, and therefore have no reason for liking one better than the other. We must, then, allow that this inclination to prefer some persons to others is natural, and we see it even in animals, which, not having reason, yet have naturally aversions and inclinations. Make the experiment with a little lamb only just born; show him the skin of a wolf, and though it

be dead, he will run away, he will bleat, he will hide himself under the side of his mother; but show him a horse, which is a much larger animal, and he will not be at all afraid, but will play with it. The reason of this is that nature has given him an alliance with the one, and an aversion to the other. Now, we must not make much account of these natural aversions, any more than of inclinations, provided we submit them all to reason. Have I an aversion to conversing with a person whom I know to be of great virtue, and from whom I may derive much profit? I must not follow my aversion which would lead me to avoid meeting him; I must make this inclination submit to my reason which would lead me to seek his conversation, or at least to remain with him when I do meet him, in the spirit of peace and tranquillity. But there are some who are so afraid of having an aversion to those whom they love through inclination, that they avoid their intercourse, for fear of discovering some fault which might destroy the sweetness of their affection and friendship.

What remedy is there for these aversions, since no one, however perfect he may be, can be exempt from them? Those who are of a severe disposition, will have an aversion to one who is very gentle, and will consider this gentleness too great softness, although this quality of gentleness is more universally beloved.

The only remedy for this evil, as for every other sort of temptation, is a simple diversion, I mean, not to think of it; but the misfortune is that we are too anxious to know whether we have any reason or not for our aversion to some person. Oh! we must never

amuse ourselves with this enquiry; for our self-love, which never sleeps, will gild the pill so well that it will make us think it good; I mean that it will show us that we really have certain reasons, which will seem to us to be good, and then, these reasons being approved by our own judgment and self-love, there will be no way of preventing us from thinking them just and reasonable. Oh! we must certainly guard against this. I am speaking rather at length of this, because it is of importance. We are never right in having aversions, much less in wanting to encourage them. I say, then, that when they are simply natural aversions, we must take no notice of them, but turn away without showing anything, and so deceive our own mind; but we must resist and overcome them when we see that the natural disposition goes farther and would make us depart from the submission we owe to reason, which never permits us to do anything to favour our aversions, or our inclinations, when they are bad, for fear of offending God. Now when we do no more to favour our aversions, than speaking a little less agreeably than we should do to a person for whom we had a great feeling of affection, it is no great thing; it is hardly in our power to do otherwise, and while we are under the influence of this passion, it would be wrong to require it of us.

The second question is, how we ought to behave in the reception of the books that are given us to read? The superioress will give a sister a book which treats very well of virtues, but because she does not like it, she will not profit by her reading; she will even read it with negligence of spirit; and the reason is that she has

already at her finger's ends all that is contained in this book, and that she would rather that another were given her to read. Now I say that it is an imperfection to choose or desire a different book from that which is given us; and it is a sign that we read rather to satisfy our curiosity, than to profit by our reading. If we read to profit, and not to please ourselves, we should be as well satisfied with one book as with another; at least we should accept willingly all those which our superioress might give us to read. I will say much more, for I assure you that we should take pleasure in never reading but one and the same book, provided it were good, and spoke of God. If there were in it nothing but the Name of God alone, we should be satisfied, since we should always have enough to do after having read and re-read it many times.

To wish to read in order to satisfy curiosity is a sign that we still have rather a light mind, and that it does not find sufficient pleasure in doing the good that it has learnt in these little books of the practice of virtues; for they treat very well of humility and mortification, which however we do not practise when we do not accept them cheerfully. Now to say, "I shall derive no profit because I do not like it," is not a just inference, any more than to say, "I already know it all by heart, I can take no pleasure in reading it." All this is childish. Do they give you a book which you already know entirely or almost entirely by heart? Thank God for it, inasmuch as you will the more easily understand His doctrine. If they give you one that you have already read several times, humble yourself, and be assured that it is God who wills it so, in order that

you may apply yourself more to doing than to learning, and that His goodness gives it you for the second and third time, because you did not profit by the first reading. But the evil from whence all this arises is that we are always seeking our own satisfaction, and not our greater perfection. If by chance the superioress in consideration of our infirmity, gives us the choice of the book we may wish for, then we may choose with simplicity; but except in that case, we must remain humbly submissive to all that the superioress orders, whether it be to our liking or not, without ever shewing the feelings we may have that are contrary to this submission.

The third question is, whether we ought to be astonished to see imperfections among ourselves, or even in superioresses? As to the first point, there is no doubt that you ought not to be at all astonished to see some imperfections among yourselves, as in other religious houses however perfect they may be; for you will never be so perfect as not to commit some here and there, according as you are tried. It is no great thing that a sister who has nothing to annoy or to try her, should be very gentle and commit few faults. When they say to me, "There is such a one whom we never see commit an imperfection," I ask directly, has she any office? If they answer me, "No," I do not make much account of her perfection; for there is a great difference between her virtue and that of another who is well tried, whether interiorly by temptations, or exteriorly by the contradictions she has to bear. For the virtue of strength and the strength of virtue are never acquired in time of peace, and while we are not tried by the

contrary temptation. Those who are very gentle while they have no contradiction, and who have not acquired this virtue sword in hand, are indeed very exemplary, and very edifying; but if they are put to the proof, you will immediately see them disturbed, and they will shew that their gentleness was not a strong and solid virtue, but imaginary rather than real. There is a great difference between the absence of a vice, and the possession of the contrary virtue. Many persons seem to be very virtuous, who yet have no virtue, because they have not acquired it by labour. It often happens that our passions sleep and remain dormant; and if during that time we do not make a provision of strength, to fight with and resist them when they come to awake, we shall be defeated in the battle.

We must always remain humble, and not think we have virtues, though we may not (at least to our knowledge) commit the faults that are contrary to them. There are certainly many people who are greatly mistaken, in that they imagine that persons who make profession of perfection ought not to fall into imperfections, and particularly religious, because they think that it only requires to enter into religion to be perfect; which is not the case; for religious orders are not meant to assemble perfect people, but those who have the courage to aspire to perfection. "But what should we do, if we saw imperfection in superiors as well as in others? Must we not be astonished at it? For people do not choose imperfect superiors," you say. Alas! my dear daughters, if we would not choose superiors or superioresses, unless they were perfect, we must pray to God to send us Saints or Angels to be superiors, for

among men we shall find none. We endeavour that they may give no bad example, but as to having no imperfection, we do not think of it, provided they have the necessary qualities of mind; because many might be found who were more perfect, but who yet would not be capable of being superiors. Tell me, did not our Lord Himself shew us that we should not consider it, by His election of St. Peter to be the superior of all the Apostles? Every one knows the fault this Apostle committed at the death and passion of his Master, in amusing himself by talking to a servant maid, and so miserably denying his dearest Lord, who had done so much for him. He put on a brave face and then afterwards he took to flight; but besides that, as soon as he was confirmed in grace by the reception of the Holy Spirit, he again committed a fault which was judged of such importance that St. Paul, writing to the Galatians, said to them that he had withstood him to the face, because he was reprehensible. And not only St. Peter, but also St. Paul and St. Barnabas, who wishing to go and preach the Gospel, had a little dispute together, because St. Barnabas wanted to take with them John Mark who was his cousin. St. Paul was of a different opinion, and did not wish that he should go with them; and St. Barnabas would not yield to the will of St. Paul; and therefore they separated, and went to preach, St. Paul in one country, and St. Barnabas in another with his cousin John Mark. It is true that our Lord drew good out of their dispute, for instead of preaching in one region of the earth, they sowed the seed of the Gospel in divers places. Let us not think while we are in this life, to live without committing imperfections, for this

cannot be, whether we are superiors or whether we are inferiors, since we are all men, and consequently all have reason to believe this truth as being very certain, in order that we may not be astonished to see ourselves all subject to imperfections. Our Lord has commanded us to say every day these words which are in the *Pater noster:* "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us:" and there is no exception to this command, because we are all in need of doing it. It is not drawing a good inference to say, "such a one is superior, therefore he is not liable to anger and has no other imperfection." You wonder that when you come to speak to the superioress, she says a word to you less gently than usual, because perhaps her head is quite full of cares and business; your self-love goes away quite disturbed, instead of thinking that God has permitted this little coolness in the superioress, to mortify your self-love, which wanted her to caress you a little and receive amiably what you had to say to her. But in short it vexes us to meet with mortification when we did not seek for it. Alas! we ought to go away praying to God for the superioress, thanking Him for this beloved contradiction. In a word, my dear daughters, let us remember the words of the great Apostle St. Paul, charity "thinketh no evil;"* meaning that as soon as it perceives it, it turns away without thinking of it or amusing itself with considering it.

You ask me further, concerning this point, if the superioress or the mistress ought not to show any repugnance to the sisters seeing her faults; and what she ought to

* 1 Corinthians xiii, 5.

say when a sister comes to accuse herself simply to her of some judgment or thought that she has had, which attributes imperfection to her; as for example, if any one had thought that the superioress had given a correction passionately. Now I say that what she ought to do in this case, is to humble herself, and to have recourse to the love of her abjection. Bnt if the sister was a little disturbed in speaking of it, the superioress should take no notice of it, but turn the conversation, and yet lay up the abjection in her heart. For we must be very careful lest our self-love should make us lose the occasion of seeing that we are imperfect, and of humbling ourselves; and though we retrench the exterior act of humility for fear of increasing the annoyance of the poor sister, we must not fail to make the interior one. If on the contrary, the sister was not at all disturbed in accusing herself, I should think it well that the superioress should freely own that she was in fault, if it is true; for if the judgment is false, it is good that she should say so with humility, nevertheless always treasuring carefully the abjection which comes to her from being thought in fault. Do you see? This little virtue of the love of our abjection ought never to be one step distant from our hearts, because we are every hour in need of it, till we become perfect: inasmuch as our passions revive sometimes even after we have lived long in religion, and after we have made great progress in perfection. So it happened to a religious of St. Pacomius, named Sylvanus, who in the world was a comedian by profession, and having been converted and become a religious, passed the year of his probation and several following years, with the most exemplary mor-

tification, and no one ever saw him do any act of his former employment; but twenty years later, he thought he might very well make some jests, under pretext of amusing his brothers, imagining that his passions were already so mortified that they would no longer have the power to make it pass beyond a simple recreation. But the poor man was greatly mistaken; for the passion of joy revived so strongly, that from jests he went on to dissoluteness, so that they resolved to turn him out of the monastery; which they would have done had it not been for one of his brother monks, who made himself pledge for Sylvanus, promising that he would reform; and this he did, and became afterwards a great saint.

Thus, my dear sisters, we must never forget what we have been, in order that we may not become worse; nor think ourselves perfect, when we do not commit many imperfections. We must also take care not to be astonished if we have passions, for we shall never be exempt from them. Those hermits, who asserted the contrary, were censured by the holy council, and their opinion condemned and held to be erroneous. We shall always then commit some faults, but we must make them very rare, and let only two be seen in fifty years; as only two were seen in all the time that the Apostles lived after they had received the Holy Spirit. If three or four were to be seen, or even seven or eight in so long a course of years, we should not be disturbed, or lose courage, but take breath and strengthen ourselves to do better.

Let us say a word more for the superioress. The sisters ought not to be surprised if the superioress

commits imperfections, since St. Peter, Pastor as he was of Holy Church, and universal superior of all christians, fell into a fault, and so great a one that he deserved correction, as St. Paul says. In the same way, the superioress ought not to shew surprise if her faults are seen; but she ought to observe the humility and sweetness with which St. Peter, though he was his superior, received the correction of St. Paul. One does not know which is the most remarkable, the strength of St. Paul's courage in reproving St. Peter, or the humility with which St. Peter submitted to the correction he received for a matter in which he thought to have done well, and had a very good intention.

Let us pass on. You ask in the fourth place, if it happened some day that a superioress had so strong an inclination to please secular persons, under pretext of doing them good, that she neglected the particular care of the sisters under her charge, or else that she had not time to do what was required for the affairs of the house, because she remained too long in the parlour; whether she would not be obliged to resist this inclination, though her intention were good? I will answer you that superiors ought to be exceedingly affable to seculars, in order to profit them, and ought to give them willingly a part of their time. But how much do you think this little part ought to be? It ought to be the twelfth, the remaining eleven to be employed in the house in the care of the family. Bees go indeed out of their hive, but only from necessity or utility, and they do not stay away long without returning; and especially the queen-bee goes out but rarely, as when the bees swarm, and she is quite surrounded by her little subjects. Religion

is a mystic hive quite full of celestial bees, who are assembled to make the honey of heavenly virtues, and for that purpose the superioress, who is among them like their queen, must be careful to keep them near her, that she may teach them how to acquire and preserve them. Nevertheless she must not on that account fail to converse with seculars when necessity or charity requires it; but otherwise, the superioress must be short with seculars. I say without charity or necessity requiring it; for there are certain persons worthy of great respect, whom we ought not to displease. But religious should never amuse themselves with seculars, under pretext of gaining friends for their congregation. Oh! there is certainly no occasion for that; for if they keep themselves retired in order to do well what they are charged with, they ought not to doubt that our Lord will sufficiently provide their congregation with the friends who are necessary for it. But if it pains the superioress to leave the company, to go when the bell rings for the Office, for fear of displeasing those with whom she is speaking, she must not be so tender; for unless they are persons of distinction, or who come but very seldom, or from a distance, she must not neglect the Office, nor prayer, if charity does not absolutely require it. As to ordinary visits from which we can freely excuse ourselves, the portress ought to say that our mother or the sisters are at prayer or at Office; if they will please to wait, or to return. But if it should happen that by some great necessity we go to the parlour during that time, let us at least take time afterwards as far as possible to make our prayer; for

as to the office no one doubts that we are obliged to say it.

Now, with regard to the last question, which is, whether some little distinction should not be always given to the superioress, as well in clothing as in eating, it shall be soon decided. For in one word I tell you, no, in no way, except in a case of necessity, when we give it to any of the sisters; she must not even have a particular seat, except in choir and in chapter; and in this seat the assistant must never place herself; though in everything else the same respect must be paid to her as to the superioress, (of course in the absence of the latter:) even in the refectory she must not have one, but only a seat like the others, though she should every where be regarded with especial distinction, and as a person who must be held in very great respect. She must in everything be as little singular as she can; we always except cases of necessity, as on her being old or infirm, for then she should be allowed to have a chair for her relief. We must carefully avoid all those things which make us appear something above others, I mean preeminent and remarkable. The superioress should be recognised and remarked for her virtues, and not for those unnecessary singularities, especially among us of the Visitation, who wish to make particular profession of great simplicity and humility. These honours are good for those religious houses where the superioress is called my lady, but we must have nothing of that kind.

What more is there to be said? How we can best preserve the spirit of the Visitation, and prevent its being dissipated? The only way is to keep it shut up

and enclosed in the observance of the rules. But you say there are some persons so jealous of this spirit, that they would not communicate it out of the house. There is a superfluity in this jealousy, which must be cut off. For to what purpose is it, I ask you, to conceal from our neighbour what might profit him? I am not of that opinion; I should wish all the good that is in the Visitation to be known and acknowledged by every one; and for that reason I have always held that it would be good to have the rules and constitutions printed, that many people seeing them, might derive some advantage from them. Would to God, my dear sisters, that many would practise them! We should soon see great changes in them, which would prove to the glory of God and the salvation of their souls. Be very careful to preserve the spirit of the Visitation; but let not this care prevent you from imparting it charitably and simply to your neighbour, to each one according to his capacity; and do not be afraid that it will be dissipated by this communication; for charity never spoils anything, but perfects everthing. Dieu soit béni.

CONFERENCE XVII

VOTES.

In which it is asked how and from what motive we must give our vote to the sisters who are to be admitted to profession, as well as to those who are to be received into the novitiate.

Two things are required for giving our vote properly to such persons as we ought. The first, that they be truly called by God. The second, that they have the conditions necessary for our manner of life. As to the first point, that a person must be really called by God to be received into religion, you must know that when I speak of this call and vocation, I do not mean to speak of the general vocation, such as that by which our Lord calls all men to Christianity; nor even of that of which it is said in the Gospel, that many are called, but few are chosen; for God, who desires to give to all eternal life, gives to all the means of attaining to it, and therefore calls them to Christianity, and has elected those who correspond to this vocation, following the attractions of God. However the number of those who come to it is very small in comparison with those who are called. But speaking more particularly of the religious vocation, I say that many are truly called by God to religion, but there are few who maintain and keep their vocation; they begin well, but they are not faithful in corresponding with grace, nor persevering in the practice of what would preserve their vocation and render it good and secure. There are others who are

not truly called; nevertheless, being come, their vocation has been rendered good and ratified by God. Thus, we see some who come into religion out of vexation and disgust; and though these vocations do not seem to be good, yet we have seen some who having come in this way have succeeded very well in the service of God. Others are led to enter religion by some disaster or misfortune they have met with in the world, others by the want of health or beauty; and although these motives are not good in themselves, yet God makes use of them to call such persons. In short, the ways of God are incomprehensible, and His judgments inscrutable and admirable in the variety of the vocations and means which He makes use of to call His creatures to His service, and which ought all to be honoured and revered.

Now, from this great variety of vocations, it follows that it is a very difficult thing to recognize true vocations, and yet the first thing that is required for giving a vote is to know whether the person proposed is truly called, and whether her vocation is good. How, then, amid so great a variety of vocations, and proceeding from such different motives, shall we be able to discern the good from the bad, without being mistaken? This is indeed a thing of great importance and difficulty; nevertheless, we are not entirely destitute of means to find out the goodness of a vocation. Now, among several that I might mention, I will tell you only one as the best of all. A good vocation, then, is nothing else than the firm and constant will of the person called, to serve God in the manner and in the place to which His Divine Majesty calls her; and that is the best sign we

can have by which to judge if a vocation is good. But, observe, that when I say a firm and constant will to serve God, I do not say that she must do from the beginning all that has to be done in her vocation, with such firmness and constancy as to be exempt from all repugnance, difficulty, or disgust, in what concerns it. No, I do not say that, and still less that her firmness and constancy must be such as to render her exempt from faults; nor that she must be so firm as never to waver nor vary in her determination to practise the means that may lead her to perfection. Oh, no! that is certainly not what I mean to say; for every man is subject to some passion, change, or vicissitude; and he will one day like one thing, and another day another thing; one day never resembles another. It is not, then, by these various emotions and sentiments that we must judge of the firmness and constancy of the will in the good resolutions that have once been made; but by the will remaining firm amidst this variety of different impulses, not quitting the good course it has embraced, though it may feel disgust, or diminution in the love of some virtue, and by its not on that account ceasing to make use of the means that are marked out for acquiring it. So that to have the signs of a good vocation, a sensible constancy is not required, but one that is effective and in the superior part of the soul. Therefore, in order to know whether God wills that we should become religious, we must not wait for Him to speak to us sensibly, nor to send us some Angel from heaven to signify to us His will; still less do we need to have revelations on this subject. Nor do we require an examination by ten or twelve doctors, to ascertain if the

inspiration be good or bad, if we should follow it or not; but we must carefully correspond to and cultivate the first movement, and then not make ourselves uneasy if there come disgust and indifference concerning it. For if we always try to keep our will very firm in seeking to do the good that is shown to us, God will not fail to make the whole succeed, to His glory.

And when I say this, I speak not only for you, but also for those in the world, of whom we ought certainly to take care, helping them in their good designs. When they feel the first inspirations rather strongly, nothing is difficult to them, they can overcome all obstacles; but when they meet with these vicissitudes, and when these first feelings are not so sensible in the inferior part, they imagine that all is lost, and that they must give up everything; they wish and they do not wish. What they then feel is not sufficient to make them leave the world. "I should wish it," one of these persons would say: "but I do not know whether it is the will of God that I should be a religious, inasmuch as the inspiration I now feel does not seem to me strong enough. It is quite true that I have felt it more strongly than I do at this moment; but as it is not lasting, I do not think it is good." Certainly, when I meet with such souls, I am not astonished at this disgust and coolness; still less can I for that reason think their vocation is not good: only we must in this case take great pains to assist them, and teach them not to be surprised at these changes, but encourage them to remain firm in the midst of them. Well, I say to them, that is nothing, tell me, have you not felt in your heart the movement or inspiration to seek so great a good? "Yes," they

say, "it is very true, but it passed away directly." Yes indeed, I answer, the force of the sentiment, but not so entirely as not to leave in you some affection. "Oh, no!" she says, "for I always have a sort of feeling which makes me tender on that point; but what troubles me is that I do not feel this inclination so strongly as would be required for such a resolution." I answer them, that they must not be troubled about these sensible feelings, nor examine them so closely; that they must be satisfied with that constancy of their will, which amid all this does not lose the affection to its first design; that they must only be careful to cultivate it well, and to correspond with this first inspiration. Do not care, I say, from what quarter it comes, for God has many ways of calling His servants into His service. He sometimes makes use of preaching, sometimes of the reading of good books. Some are called by hearing the sacred words of the Gospel, as St. Francis and St. Anthony were, by hearing these words: "Go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and follow me;" * and, "If any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."† Others have been called by the annoyances, disasters, and afflictions which came upon them in the world, which caused them to be disgusted with it, and to abandon it. Our Lord has often made use of such means to call many persons to His service whom He could not have had otherwise. For though God is all-powerful, and can do what He wills, He yet does not will to take away the liberty He has once given us; and when He calls

* St. Matthew xix. 21. † Ibid. xvi. 24.

us to His service, He will have us enter it willingly and not by force or constraint. For though these persons come to God as it were in anger against the world which has displeased them, or on account of some troubles and afflictions which have tormented them, yet they do not fail to give themselves to God of their own free will; and very often such persons succeed well in the service of God, and become great Saints, sometimes greater than those who have entered it with more evident vocations. You must have read what Platus relates of a fine gentleman of the world, who was one day dressed and curled very smartly and mounted on his handsome horse, trying in every way to please the ladies; but as he was displaying himself, he was thrown by his horse on the ground into the middle of the mud, so that he got up all dirty and muddy. This poor gentleman was so ashamed and confused at this accident that in anger he instantly resolved to become a monk, saying, "O treacherous world! thou hast laughed at me, but I will also laugh at thee; thou hast played me this trick, but I will play thee another; for I will never more have anything to do with thee, and from this hour I resolve to become a religious." And in fact he was received into religion, where he lived holily; nevertheless his vocation came from a vexation.

There are even others, whose motives are still worse than his. I have heard, on good authority, that a gentleman of our age, distinguished in mind and person, and of good family, seeing some Capuchin Fathers pass by, said to the other noblemen that were with him, "I have a fancy to find out how these bare-footed men

ve. and to go amongst them, not meaning to remain there always, but only for three weeks or a month, so as to observe better what they do, and then to mock and laugh at it afterwards with you." So he made his plot, pursued it steadily, and was at length received; but Divine Providence, which made use of these means to withdraw him from the world, converted his wicked purpose into a good one; and he who thought to take in others was taken in himself, for no sooner had he lived a few days with those good religious, than he was entirely changed. He persevered faithfully in his vocation, and became a great servant of God.

There are again others whose vocation is no better than this; those who go into religion on account of some natural defect, for instance because they are lame, or blind of one eye, or ugly, or have some other similar defect; and what seems still worse is that they are sent into it by their fathers and mothers, who very often when they have a child that is half-blind, lame, or otherwise defective, leave it by the fireside and say, "This one is good for nothing in the world, we must send him into religion; we must procure some benefice for him; that will be so much burden taken off our hands." The children let themselves be led as their parents wish, in the hope of living on the revenues of the Church. Others have a great number of children: "Well," say they, "we must disburden our house, and send these into religion, in order that the elder ones may have all the property, and make a show in the world." But God very often in these cases shows the greatness of His clemency and mercy, by employing these intentions, which are by no means good in them-

selves, to make those persons great servants of His Divine Majesty. And in this He shows Himself admirable. Thus this Divine Artisan takes pleasure in making beautiful buildings with wood that is very crooked, and has no appearance of being fit for anything; and as a person who does not understand carpenter's work, seeing some crooked wood in a carpenter's shop, would be astonished to hear him say it was meant for making some fine work of art, (for, he would say, how often must the plane pass over it before it can be fit for such work?) so Divine Providence usually makes master-pieces out of these crooked and sinister intentions. And He makes the lame and the blind come in to His feast, to show us that we need not have two eyes or two feet to enter Paradise; that it is better to go to heaven with one leg, one eye, or one arm, than to have two and be lost. Now this sort of people, having entered religion in this way, have often been known to make great progress, and to persevere faithfully in their vocation.

There are others who have been truly called, but who have not persevered, and after having remained some time in religion, have abandoned everything. Of this we have an example in Judas, whom we cannot doubt to have been truly called; for our Lord chose him and called him to the Apostolate with His own mouth. Whence came it then that being so truly called, he did not persevere in his vocation? Oh! it was because he abused his liberty and would not make use of the means that God gave him for this purpose, but instead of embracing them and using them to his profit, he abused and rejected them; and so doing, he was

lost. For it is certain that, when God calls any one by a vocation, He obliges Himself in consequence, by His Divine Providence, to furnish him with all the help requisite to render him perfect in his vocation. Now when I say that our Lord obliges Himself, we must not think that it is we who oblige Him by following His vocation; for we cannot oblige Him; but God Himself obliges Himself, being urged and provoked to it by the bowels of His infinite goodness and mercy. So that when I become a religious, our Lord obliges Himself to furnish me with all that is required to make me a good religious, not at all from necessity, but out of His infinite mercy and providence; just as, when a great king levies soldiers to make war, his foresight and prudence require that he should prepare weapons to arm them. For what sense would there be in sending them to fight without arms? If he did so, he would be taxed with great imprudence. Now, the Divine Majesty is never wanting in care and foresight on this point, and the better to convince us of it, He has bound Himself to it; so that we must never conceive the idea that it is His fault if we do not do well; His liberality is even so great, that He gives these means to those to whom He has not promised them, and to whom He has not bound Himself, since He has not called them. Observe also, that when I say that God has obliged Himself to give to those whom He calls all the conditions required to make them perfect in their vocation, I do not say that He gives them all at once, and the moment they enter into religion. Oh no! we must not suppose that by entering religion we are to be quickly perfect; it is enough that we come to it to tend towards perfection,

and to embrace all the means of perfecting ourselves; and for this it is necessary to have that firm and constant will, of which we have spoken, to embrace all the means adapted to make us perfect in the vocation to which we are called.

See then how hidden and secret are the judgments of God, and how some persons, who through vexation and in mockery entered religion, do nevertheless persevere in it; while others being truly called, and having begun with great fervour, end badly and give up all. It is then a very difficult thing to know whether a person is really called by God, in order to give her your vote; for though she may appear fervent, perhaps she will not persevere; but so much the worse for her. If you see that she has a constant will to serve God and to become perfect, do not fail to give her your vote. For if she accepts the help which our Lord will infallibly give her, she will persevere; and if after some years she loses her perseverance, to her own loss, you are not the cause of it, it is she herself. This then is concerning the first part, the knowledge of vocations.

As to the second point which is touching the conditions that persons ought to have, first for being received into the monastery, secondly for being received into the noviciate, and thirdly to profession; I have scarcely anything to say about the first reception; for one cannot know much of these persons who come with so fair a promise. Speak to them and they will do whatever you wish: they are like St. John and St. James to whom our Lord said, "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" They answered boldly

and frankly: "We can:"* and the night of the Passion they abandoned Him. These persons do the same; they make so many reverences and so many bows, they show so much good will, that one cannot well refuse them; and indeed I think we need not give it much consideration. I say this of the interior, for it is certainly very difficult to ascertain it at that time, especially in persons who come from a distance. All that we can do with these, is to learn who they are, and such things as are temporal and exterior, and then to open the door to them and admit them to their first trial. If they are persons of the neighbourhood, we may observe their manners, and by their conversation find out something of their interior; but I think even this is very difficult, for they always come with the best manner and appearance they can. Now it seems to me that we ought to make little or no account of bodily health and infirmity; inasmuch as in these houses we may receive the weak and infirm as well as the strong and robust, since they were established partly for them: provided the infirmities be not so pressing as to render them quite incapable of observing the rule, and unable to do what belongs to this vocation. But with that exception, I would never refuse my vote, not even if they were blind or had but one arm or one leg, if they still had the other conditions required by this vocation. And let not human prudence come and say to me here, "And if such persons were always to present themselves, should we always receive them? And if all were blind or sick, who would take care of them?" Now do not let this disturb you, for it

* St. Matthew xx. 22.

will not happen; leave the care of it to divine Providence, who will know how to provide for it, and to call the strong who are necessary for their service. When infirm people present themselves, say, God be praised. Do robust persons come? So much the better. In short, maladies which do not hinder the observance of the rule, ought not to be considered in your houses; and that is what I had to say concerning the first reception.

As to the second reception, which is the receiving a person to the noviciate, I do not think there are any great difficulties in that either. Yet we should give it more consideration than the first reception; for we have had more opportunities of observing their temper, actions and habits. We see clearly the passions they have, but all this should not prevent their being admitted to the noviciate, provided they are well disposed to amend, to submit themselves, and to make use of the remedies proper for their cure. And though they may have repugnance to these remedies, and take them with great difficulty, that is no matter, provided they do not fail to use them; for medicines are always bitter to the taste, and it is not possible to receive them with the same pleasure as if they were agreeable; but notwithstanding that, they do not fail to produce their effect, and they produce most effect when they give most pain and uneasiness. In the same way there is a postulant with strong passions, she is hasty, she commits many faults; if with all this she desires to be cured, and is willing to be corrected and mortified, and to receive the remedies likely to cure her, though in taking them she is annoyed and suffers, we must not on that account refuse her our

vote; for she not only desires to be cured, but also takes the remedies that are given her for the purpose, though with pain and difficulty.

There will be some who have been badly brought up and badly educated, whose nature is rough and coarse. Now there is no doubt that these will have more trouble and difficulty than those who are by nature sweet and tractable, and they will be liable to fall into more faults than those who have been better educated; nevertheless if they really wish to be cured, and show a decided will to take the remedies whatever it may cost them, to these I will give my vote in spite of their falls; for they, after much labour, will bear great fruit in religion, become great servants of God, and acquire a strong and solid virtue. For the grace of God supplies their defects, and there is no doubt that often the less there is by nature, the more there is by grace. So then we should not fail to receive postulants to the noviciate, though they may have many bad habits, a rough and coarse disposition, and show a great deal of passion, provided they wish to be cured. In short, to receive a postulant to the noviciate, we need only know whether she has a good will, and whether she has deliberately resolved to receive the treatment that will be given her for her cure, and so live in great submission. Knowing this, I would give her my vote; and this seems to me to be all that can be said touching this second reception.

In the third place, it is a thing of great importance to receive a person to profession; and in this it appears to me we must observe two things. The first, that those whom we receive to profession be sound, not in body, as I have already said, but in heart and mind; I

mean that their hearts be disposed to live in complete pliability and submission. The second, that they have an intelligent mind. Now when I say an intelligent mind, I do not mean those clever people who are usually vain, and full of their own judgment and self-sufficiency, and who in the world were receptacles of vanity, who come into religion not to humble themselves, but as if they were going to give lessons in philosophy and theology, wanting to lead and govern everything. Now it is about these we must be on our guard; I say we must be on our guard, and not that we must not receive any such, if we see that they wish to be changed and humbled; for with time and the grace of God, they may well make this change; and this will no doubt happen, if they faithfully make use of the remedies that will be given them for their cure. When I speak then of an intelligent mind, I mean well regulated and sensible minds, and also those of moderate powers, which are neither too great nor too little; for such minds always do a great deal, without knowing it however. They apply themselves to labour, and give themselves to solid virtues; they are tractable, and there is not much trouble in guiding them, for they easily understand how good a thing it is to let themselves be governed.

The third thing that we must observe, is, whether the sister has laboured well in her year of noviciate, whether she has suffered well and profited by the remedies that have been given her, whether she has kept the resolutions she made on entering her noviciate, to change her evil temper and inclinations: for the year of noviciate was given her for this purpose. And if we see that she has persevered faithfully in her resolution, that her will to

remain continues firm and constant, that she has applied herself to forming and reforming herself according to the rules and constitutions, and that this desire to be always doing better is lasting, it is a good sign and a good reason for giving her your vote. And though notwithstanding this, she may commit faults, and even great ones, we still ought not to refuse her our vote. For though in the year of her noviciate she ought to labour at the reformation of her manners and habits, we cannot say that she ought never to fall, or that she ought to be perfect at the end of her noviciate. For look at the glorious Apostles in the college of our Lord; though they were clearly called, and had laboured much in the reformation of their lives, how many faults did they commit, not only in the first year, but also in the second and third! They all said and promised wonders, even that they would follow our Lord to prison and to death. But the night of the Passion when their good Master was taken, they all abandoned Him. I mean by this that faults ought not to be a reason for rejecting a sister, when in spite of all this she retains a decided will to amend them, and to make use of the means given her for this end. That is what I had to say touching the conditions which the sisters should have who are to be received to profession, and what the sisters who vote for them are to observe. And I will finish my discourse on this subject, unless I am asked some further question.

You ask then in the first place, "What is to be done, if there should be a young person very liable to be disturbed about little things, and whose mind was often full of sadness and disquiet, and who amid this showed

but little love for her vocation, but yet when this had passed away she promised to do wonders?" It is quite certain that such a person, being so changeable, is not fit for religion. But with all this, does she not desire to be cured? because if not, she must be dismissed. "We do not know," you say, "whether that proceeds from want of desire to be cured, or from her not understanding in what true virtue consists." Now, if after having made her clearly understand what she should do for her amendment, she does not do it, but remains incorrigible, we must reject her; above all because her faults, as you say, do not proceed from want of judgment, nor from want of comprehending in what true virtue consists, still less of knowing what she ought to do for her improvement; but from a defect of the will, which has no perseverance or constancy in doing and making use of what she knows to be required for her amendment. Though she may say she will do better, yet if she does not, but perseveres in this inconstancy of purpose, I would not give her my vote.

You say again that there are some so tender that they cannot bear to be corrected, without being troubled, and it often makes them ill. Now if that is so, you must open the door for them; for since they are ill, and will not allow themselves to be treated, or to have the proper remedies applied for their cure, we see clearly that by so doing they become incorrigible, and give no hope of being able to be cured.

With regard to tenderness, as well of mind as of body, it is one of the great hindrances of the religious life, and therefore we must take great care not to receive those who are beyond measure subject to it.

because they are not willing to be cured, and refuse what might give them health.

You ask in the second place, "What to think of one who shows by her words that she repents of having entered religion?" If she perseveres in this disgust at her vocation, and in repenting of it, and if you see that this renders her slothful and negligent in forming herself according to the spirit of her vocation, you must send her away. Nevertheless we must remember that this may happen either as a simple temptation, or as a trial; and that may be ascertained by the profit she will derive from such thoughts of disgust or repentance, when she accuses herself with simplicity of such things, and is faithful in using the remedies that are given her for them. For God never permits any thing to try us, without willing that we should profit by it; which we always do when we are faithful in accusing ourselves, and simple, as I have said, in believing and doing what we are told; and this is the sign that the trial is from God. But when we see that the person uses her own judgment, and that her will is seduced and corrupted, so as to persevere in her disgust, then the matter is in a bad state and almost beyond remedy; we must send her away.

You ask in the third place, "If it does not require consideration to vote for a sister who is not cordial, or who is not alike with regard to all the sisters, but has shown that she has more inclination for one than for another?" We must not be so rigorous in all these little things. Do you see? this inclination is the last thing that we can renounce. For time is required before we can arrive at such a point as to have no more

inclination for one than for another, and before these affections can be so mortified that they shall not appear. We must observe in this, as in every thing else, whether this sister becomes incorrigible.

Lastly, you say, "If the opinion of the others were quite contrary to what we know, and if we had an inspiration to say something that we know of to the advantage of this sister, ought we to omit saying it?" No, though the opinion of the others be quite contrary to yours, and you may be alone in this opinion, because it might be of use to the others in resolving what they ought to do. The Holy Spirit ought to preside over communities, and according to the variety of opinions we form our resolution, so as to do whatever we judge most expedient for His glory. Now, this desire you have, that the others should give their votes or not, or that you should give yours or not, must be despised and rejected as another temptation; but we must never let the sisters perceive our inclinations or aversions on this occasion. In short, with regard to all the imperfections which persons bring with them from the world, we must keep this rule: when we see that they improve, though they still commit faults, we must not reject them, for by improving they show that they wish not to remain incorrigible.

CONFERENCE XVIII.

THE SACRAMENTS.

How the Sacraments are to be received, and the holy office recited; with some points regarding prayer.

Before we learn how we should prepare ourselves to receive the Sacraments, and what fruit we should derive from them, it is necessary to know what the Sacraments are, and their effects. The Sacraments, then, are the channels by which, so to speak, God descends to us, as by prayer we rise to Him; since prayer is nothing else but an elevation of our mind in God. The effects of the Sacraments are divers, though they all have but one end and aim, which is to unite us to God. By the Sacrament of Baptism we unite ourselves to God as the son to the father; by that of Confirmation we unite ourselves as the soldier to his captain, deriving strength to fight against and overcome our enemies in all temptations. By the Sacrament of Penance we are united to God, as reconciled friends; by that of the Eucharist, as food with the body; by that of Extreme Unction, we unite ourselves to God like the child who comes from a distant country, and already has one foot in his father's house, to reunite himself with him, with his mother, and all the family.

Such are the divers effects of the Sacraments, but yet they all require the union of our soul with its God. We will now speak of only two, those of Penance and the Eucharist. And in the first place, it is very neces-

sary that we should know why, receiving these two Sacraments so often, we do not also receive the graces they are accustomed to bring to souls that are well prepared, since these graces are attached to the Sacraments I will tell you in one word; it is for want of the necessary preparation, and therefore we should learn how to prepare ourselves well for receiving these two Sacraments, and also all the others. The first preparation, then, is purity of intention; the second is attention; and the third is humility. As to purity of intention, it is a thing absolutely necessary, not only in the reception of the Sacraments, but also in all that we do. Now, the intention is pure, when we receive the Sacraments, or do any other thing whatever it may be, in order to unite ourselves to God and to please Him, without any mixture of self-interest. You will know this, if when you wish to communicate and are not permitted, or when after Holy Communion you have no consolation, you still do not fail to remain in peace, without consenting to the temptations that might attack you. But if, on the contrary, you consent to a feeling of disquiet because you were not allowed to communicate, or because you felt no consolation, who does not see that your intention was impure, and that you were seeking consolations and not to be united with God, since your union with Him must be attained by the holy virtue of obedience? And, in the same way, if you desire perfection with a desire full of disquiet, who does not see that it is self-love, which is unwilling that any imperfection should be visible in us? If it were possible that being imperfect we could be as pleasing to God as if we were perfect, we ought to desire to be without perfec-

tion in order by this means to cherish holy humility in us.

The second preparation is attention. We ought certainly to go to the Sacraments with great attention, as well to the greatness of the action, as to what each Sacrament requires of us. For example, in going to confession, we must bring to it a heart lovingly sorrowful, and to Holy Communion we must bring a heart full of burning love. I do not mean by this great attention that we must have no distractions, for that is not in our power; but I intend to say that we must take very particular care not to dwell upon them willingly.

The third preparation is humility, which is a virtue very necessary for receiving abundantly the graces that flow in the channels of the Sacraments, because waters run more swiftly and strongly when the channels are laid in places that slope and incline downwards.

But besides these three preparations, I wish to tell you in a word, that the principal one is the entire abandonment of ourselves to the mercy of God, submitting without reserve our every wish and all our affections to His dominion. I say without reserve, because our misery is so great that we are always reserving something to ourselves. The most spiritual persons usually reserve to themselves the wish to have virtues; and when they go to Communion, they say, "O Lord, I abandon myself entirely into Thy hands; but if Thou pleasest, give me prudence that I may know how to live honourably." (But simplicity they do not ask for.) "O, my God, I submit absolutely to Thy Divine Will;

but give me a great courage to do excellent works in Thy service." (But of sweetness to live peaceably with their neighbour, they do not speak at all.) Another will say, "Give me that humility which is so well calculated to give a good example." (But humility of heart, which makes us love our own abjection, they seem to think they do not require.) "O, my God, since I am all Thine, let me always have consolations in prayer." (Oh! it is not this that we want in order to be united to God, which is our aim.) And yet they never ask for tribulations and mortifications. To reserve to ourselves all our own wishes, however good they may appear, is not the way to accomplish this union; for our Lord, being pleased to give Himself all to us, wills that we should reciprocally give ourselves entirely to Him, in order that the union of our soul with His Divine Majesty may be more perfect, and that we may be able truly to say, after that great model of perfection among Christians, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." *

The second part of this preparation consists in emptying our heart of all things, in order that our Lord may fill it entirely with Himself. Certainly, the reason why we do not receive the grace of sanctification (since one single Communion well made is able and sufficient to make us holy and perfect) is solely that we do not let our Lord reign in us, as His goodness desires to do. This Beloved of our souls comes to us, and He finds our hearts quite full of desires, affections, and little wills. That is not what He is seeking; He wishes to

* Galatians ii. 20.

find them empty, that He may take possession of them and govern them. And to show how much He desires it, He says to His holy spouse, that she is to put Him as a seal upon her heart, so that nothing may enter there but with His permission and according to His good pleasure. Now, I know very well that the centre of your hearts is empty (otherwise you would be guilty of too great an infidelity); I mean that you have not only rejected and detested mortal sin, but also every sort of evil affection. But alas! all the corners and recesses of our hearts are full of a thousand things unworthy to appear in the presence of that Sovereign Lord, which seem to tie His hands and prevent Him from imparting to us the blessings and graces that His Goodness had desired to give us if He had found us prepared. Let us then, on our part, do what is in our power to prepare ourselves well to receive this supersubstantial Bread, abandoning ourselves entirely to Divine Providence, not only in what regards temporal things, but chiefly spiritual; pouring out in the presence of the Divine Goodness all our affections, desires, and inclinations, that they may be entirely submitted to Him; and we may rest assured that our Lord will, on His part, fulfil the promise He has made us of transforming us into Himself, elevating our baseness so as to be united to His greatness.

We may very well communicate for divers intentions; as to ask of God to be delivered from some temptation or affliction, either for ourselves or our friends; or to ask for some virtue, provided it be under the condition of uniting ourselves by this means more perfectly to God; which, however does not very often happen,

for in time of affliction we are usually more united to God, because we more often remember Him. And with regard to virtues, it is sometimes better and more fitting for us not to have them habitually than to have them, provided however that we make acts of them as occasion presents itself; for the repugnance that we feel to practising some virtue, ought to serve to humble us, and humility is of more value than any of these things. Lastly, in all the prayers and requests you make to God, you must make them not only for yourself, but you must take care to say *us*, as our Lord has taught us in the Lord's Prayer, in which there is neither *my*, nor *mine*, nor *me*. This means that you should have the intention of asking God to give the virtue or the grace that you ask for yourself, to all who are in the same need of it, and always in order to be more closely united with Him; this being the only end for which we should ask or desire anything, either for ourselves or our neighbour, since it is the end for which the Sacraments were instituted. We must, then, correspond to this intention of our Lord, by receiving them for this same end; and we must not suppose we lose anything by communicating or praying for others, unless we offer to God that Communion or prayer for the satisfaction of their sins, for then we should not be satisfying for our own; although the merit of the Communion and of the prayer would still remain to us, for we cannot merit grace for each other; our Lord alone could do that. We can, indeed, impetrate graces for others, but merit them we cannot.

The prayer that we have made for otners augments our merit, both for the reward of grace in this life and

of glory in the next. And if a person were not to attend to doing anything for the satisfaction of his sins, his attention to doing all that he did for the pure love of God would alone suffice to satisfy them; since it is certain that whoever should be able to make an excellent act of love, or an act of perfect contrition, would fully satisfy for all his sins.

You would wish, perhaps, to know how you can ascertain whether you profit by the reception of the Sacraments. You will perceive it by your advancing in the virtues that are appropriate to them; as is the case when from confession you gain humility, and the love of your own abjection, for these are the virtues that belong to it, and we can always measure our advancement by our humility. Do not you know that it is said that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted?" * Now to be exalted is to advance.

If by means of Holy Communion you become very gentle (since it is the virtue belonging to this Sacrament, which is all gentleness, all sweetness, all honey), you will reap the fruit that belongs to it, and so you will advance; but if, on the contrary, you do not become more humble, or more gentle, you deserve to have the Bread taken from you, since you will not work.

I should wish that when we desire to communicate, we should go simply and ask leave of the superioress, resigned to accept the refusal humbly, if we are refused; and if our request is granted, that we should go lovingly to Communion. We must not omit to ask because it is a mortification to do so; for those who enter into the

* St. Luke xiv. 11.

congregation enter it to mortify themselves, and the cross that they wear ought to remind them of this. If the inspiration should come to any one not to communicate as often as the others, on account of her knowledge of her own unworthiness, she may ask the superioress, waiting with great sweetness and humility for the judgment she will give.

I should wish you also not to be disquieted, when people speak of some fault that you have, or of some virtue that you have not; but to bless God that He has manifested to us the means of acquiring virtue and of correcting our imperfection; and then to take courage and make use of these means. We must have generous minds, which attach themselves to God alone, and make the superior part reign in our souls, without attending at all to what the inferior part desires; since it is entirely in our power, with the grace of God, never to consent to the inferior. Consolations and tendernesses ought not to be desired, since they are not necessary for the loving our Lord more. We must not, then, stop to consider whether we have good sentiments, but we must do what they would induce us to do, if we had them. We must not either be so tender in wanting to confess so many little imperfections, since we are not even obliged to confess venial sins, unless we wish it; but when we confess them we must have the resolute will to cure ourselves of them, otherwise it would be an abuse to confess them. Nor must we torment ourselves, when we do not remember our faults for confession; for it is incredible that a soul that often makes an examen should not remark and remember the faults that are of impor-

tance; as for the many slight and little defects, you may speak of them to our Lord, every time you perceive them, and an abasement of spirit or a sigh is sufficient for this.

You ask how you can make your act of contrition in a short time. I answer that hardly any time is required to make it well; since nothing more is necessary than to prostrate ourselves before God in the spirit of humility and of repentance for having offended Him.

You desire, in the second place, that I should speak to you about the Office. I am very willing, and I tell you first that we must prepare ourselves to say it, from the moment we hear the bell that summons us to it; and we must, in imitation of St. Bernard, ask our heart what it is going to do, and this not only on that occasion, but also on beginning all our exercises, in order to bring to each the spirit that belongs to it. For it would not be suitable to go to Office as we do to recreation. To recreation we must bring a spirit lovingly joyous, and to Office a spirit seriously loving. When we say: "Deus in adjutorium meum intende;" we must think that our Lord on His part says to us, "And you be attentive to me."

Let those who understand some little of what they say in the Office, employ this talent faithfully according to the good pleasure of God, who has given it them to help them in keeping themselves recollected by means of the good affections they may draw from it; and let those who understand nothing keep themselves simply attentive to God, or else let them make loving aspirations, while the other choir says the verse, and

they make the pauses. We must also consider that we say the same Office as the Angels, though in a different language, and that we are before the same God before Whom the Angels tremble; and just as a man who was speaking to a king would be very attentive, fearing to make some mistake, and if, notwithstanding all his care, he happened to make one, he would immediately blush for it; so ought we in saying Office to be on our guard, for fear of failing. It is also necessary that we should be careful to pronounce and say it as it is ordered, especially in the beginning. And if we happen to make some mistake, we must humble ourselves, and not be astonished, since it is not a strange thing, and we make many elsewhere. But if we make many, and continue to do so, it is probable that we have not conceived a true sorrow for our first fault; and this negligence ought to make us feel great confusion, not because of the presence of the superioress, but from respect to that of God, who is present with us, and of His Angels. Now, it is almost a general rule, that when we so often commit the same fault, it is a sign that we are wanting in desire to amend it; and if it is a thing of which we have often been admonished, it looks as if we neglected the admonition.

For the rest, we need not have a scruple about leaving out two or three verses in the whole Office by mistake, provided we do not do it on purpose. If you were to sleep during a good part of the Office, though you said the verses of your choir, you would be obliged to say it again; but when you do the things necessary to be done during Office, such as coughing, &c., or w

the mistress of ceremonies speaks about what concerns the Office, you are not obliged to say it again.

When you come into choir after the Office is begun, you must take your place and follow the Office with the others; and after it is said, you must take up what the choir had said before you came, ending where you had begun before; or else you must say to yourself what the choir had said, and then, having overtaken it, go on with it, in case your assistance is really necessary.

You must not repeat your Office because you were distracted in saying it, provided it was not voluntarily; and even if you were to find yourself at the end of some psalm, without being very sure whether you have said it, because you have been distracted without perceiving it, do not fail to pass on, humbling yourself before God; for we must not always suppose there has been negligence when the distraction has been long. It may very well last the whole length of an Office, without our being in fault; and however bad it may be, we must not be disturbed, but simply reject it from time to time before God. I should wish you never to be troubled at the bad sentiments you have, but to employ yourselves courageously and faithfully that you may not consent to them, since there is a great difference between feeling and consenting.

You wish me to say something to you about prayer. Many people are much mistaken in thinking that it requires a great deal of method to make it well, and they are eager to find out a certain art which they fancy it necessary to know, never ceasing to analyse and to make frivolous enquiries about their prayer, to

see how they make it, or how they might make it to their satisfaction, and they think they must not cough or stir during this time, for fear the Spirit of God should retire. This is certainly great folly; as if the Spirit of God were so delicate as to depend on the method and gestures of those who make the prayer. I do not say that we should not make use of the methods that are pointed out; but we should not be attached to them, like those who think they cannot have made their prayer well, unless they make their considerations before the affections which our Lord gives them; which is, nevertheless, the end for which we make the considerations. Such persons resemble those who having reached the place they were going to, turn back, because they did not come by the way that had been shown them. It is, however, required that we should behave with great reverence, in speaking to the Divine Majesty; since the Angels, who are so pure, tremble in His presence. "But," some will say, "I cannot always have that feeling of the presence of God, which causes so great humiliation of the soul, nor that sensible reverence which so sweetly and agreeably annihilates one before God." Now, I do not mean to speak of that, but of what makes our superior part and the highest point of the spirit keep itself low and humble before God, in acknowledgment of His infinite greatness, and of our profound littleness and unworthiness.

We must also have a strong determination never to give up prayer, whatever difficulties we may meet with in it, nor go to it preoccupied with desires of consolation and satisfaction; for that would not be uniting and adapting our will to that of our Lord who

wills that when we begin to pray, we should be resolved to bear the pain of the continual distractions, dryness and disgust which will come upon us; remaining as well pleased as if we had had much consolation and tranquillity; since it is certain that our prayer will not be the less pleasing to God, nor useful to ourselves, for having been made with more difficulty. For provided we always conform our will to that of the Divine Majesty, remaining simply waiting and disposed to receive with love whatever His good pleasure may send us, whether in prayer, or in other circumstances, He will provide that all things may be profitable to us and agreeable in the eyes of His Divine Goodness. We shall make our prayer well then, my dear sisters, if we keep ourselves in peace and tranquillity near our Lord, or in His presence, without any other desire or intention than to be with Him and to please Him.

The first method then of occupying ourselves in prayer, is to consider some point, such as the mysteries of the Life, Passion, and Death of our Lord, which are the most useful; and it is very seldom that we fail to profit by the consideration of what our Lord has done. He is the Sovereign Master whom the Eternal Father sent into the world, to teach us what we ought to do; and therefore, besides the obligation we are under to form ourselves upon this Divine Model, we ought to be very exact in considering His actions in order to imitate them, because it is one of the most excellent intentions we can make in all that we do, to do it because our Lord did it; that is to say to practise virtues because our Father practised them, and as He practised them. In order to understand this well,

we must faithfully weigh them, contemplate and consider them in prayer. For the child who loves his father dearly, is very fond of conforming himself to his inclinations, and of imitating him in all his actions. It is true, as you say, there are some souls who cannot dwell nor occupy their minds upon any mystery, being attracted to a certain very sweet simplicity which keeps them in great tranquillity before God, without any other consideration than the knowledge that they are before Him, and that He is their only good. It is good and useful to remain thus; but, generally speaking, all the sisters should be made to begin by the method of prayer which is the most sure, and which leads to a reformation of life and change of habits, namely that which is made upon the mysteries of the Life and Death of our Lord; in this path we walk in safety. We must therefore apply in good earnest to our Master, to learn what He wishes us to do: and those who can make use of the imagination, ought to do so, but they must use it very soberly, simply, and shortly. The holy Fathers have left on this subject many pious and devout considerations of which we may make use. For since these Saints and great personages have made them, who will not venture to use them? And who will dare to refuse to believe piously what they have very piously believed? We must with confidence follow persons of such authority. But people have not been contented with what they have left; many have invented a quantity of other imaginations, and of these we must not make use in meditations, for they may do harm.

We should make our resolutions in the fervour of prayer, when the Sun of justice enlightens us and ani-

mates us by His inspiration. I do not mean that we must for this purpose have great feeling and consolation, though, when God gives it to us, we are obliged to make our profit out of it and to correspond to His love; but when He does not give it, we must not be wanting in fidelity, but live according to reason, and the Divine Will, and make our resolutions with the highest point of the spirit and the superior part of our soul, not failing to give them effect and put them in practice, because of any dryness, repugnance, or contradiction that may present itself. This is concerning the first method of meditation which many great saints have practised, as being very good, when it is made as it ought to be.

The second method of meditation is to make no use of the imagination, but to keep ourselves to the letter; that is to say, to meditate purely and simply on the Gospel and the mysteries of our faith, conversing familiarly and quite simply with our Lord on what He did and suffered for us, without any representation. Now, this method is much higher and better than the first, and at the same time is more holy and more safe; therefore we ought to adopt it readily, however little attraction we may have to it, remembering in every degree of prayer to keep our minds in a holy liberty that we may follow the lights and movements which God will give us in it. But as for the other higher methods of prayer, unless God absolutely gives them, I beg you will not enter upon them of yourselves, without the advice of those who direct you.

CONFERENCE XIX.

THE VIRTUES OF ST. JOSEPH.

The just man is like the palm-tree, as Holy Church makes us sing on each feast of a holy confessor. But as the palm-tree has a very great variety of particular properties above all other trees, being the prince and king of trees, both for its beauty and the goodness of its fruit, so there is a very great variety of justice. Though all the just are just and equal in justice, yet there is a great disproportion between the particular acts of their justice; this is represented by the garment of the first Joseph, which was so long as to reach down to his feet, and ornamented with a beautiful variety of flowers. Every just man has the garment of justice reaching to his feet; that is to say, all the faculties and powers of the soul are clothed with justice, and the interior and exterior represent nothing but justice itself, being just in all its emotions and actions, as well interior as exterior. And yet we must confess that each garment is ornamented with divers beautiful varieties of flowers, the diversity of which does not make them less pleasing or less precious. The great St. Paul, the hermit, was just with a very perfect justice, and nevertheless it is unquestionable that he never practised so much charity towards the poor as St. John, who was for that reason called the Almoner, nor had he ever the occasion to practise munificence; and therefore he did not possess that virtue in so high a degree as many other saints. He possessed

all virtues, but some not in so high a degree as others. Some of the saints have excelled in one virtue, others in another, and yet they are all saved, though in very different ways, there being as many different sanctities as there are saints. This then being presupposed, I observe that among all the properties of the palm-tree, which are very numerous, there are three which are particularly suitable to the saint whose feast we are celebrating, who, as Holy Church makes us say, is like the palm-tree. Oh, what a saint is the glorious St. Joseph! He is not only a patriarch, but the chief of all patriarchs; he is not simply a confessor, but more than a confessor; for in his confession is contained the dignity of bishops, the generosity of martyrs, and of all the other saints. It is then with good reason that he is compared to the palm-tree, the king of trees, which has the property of virginity, that of humility, and that of constancy and valour, three virtues in which the glorious St. Joseph greatly excelled; and if one dared to make comparisons, many persons would maintain that he surpasses all other saints in these three virtues. Among palm-trees are found the male and the female. The male palm-tree bears no fruit, and yet is not unfruitful, for the female palm would bear no fruit without it and without its aspect. So that if the female palm is not planted near the male palm-tree, and is not in sight of it, it remains unfruitful, and bears no dates, which are its fruit; but if, on the contrary, it is near the palm-tree and in sight of it, it bears a quantity of fruit, but quite purely and virginally. The palm-tree does not contribute any of its substance to this production; yet no one can say that it has not a great share

in the fruit of the female palm, which without it would not bear any, but would remain barren and unfruitful. God having destined in His Divine Providence from all eternity, that a Virgin should conceive a Son who should be God and Man together, willed nevertheless that this Virgin should be married. But, O God! for what reason, say the holy doctors, did He ordain two things so different, to be a virgin and married at the same time? Most of the fathers say that it was to prevent our Lady's being calumniated by the Jews, who would not have exempted her from calumny and disgrace, and would have made themselves the judges of her purity; and that to preserve this purity and this virginity, it was necessary that Divine Providence should commit her to the charge and custody of a man who was a virgin, and that this Virgin should conceive and bring forth that sweet fruit of life, our Lord, under the shadow of a holy marriage. St. Joseph, then, was like a palm-tree, which, though bearing no fruit, is yet not unfruitful, but has a great share in the fruit of the female palm. Not that St. Joseph contributed anything to this holy and glorious production, except only the shadow of marriage, which guarded our Lady and glorious Mistress from all sorts of calumnies, and from the censures that her pregnancy would have brought upon her. And if he contributed to it nothing of his own, he still had a great share in this most holy fruit of his sacred spouse; for she belonged to him, and was planted quite close to him, like a glorious palm near its beloved palm-tree, which, in the order of Divine Providence, could not and would not produce fruit but under his shadow and in his sight, I mean under the shadow of the holy marriage

they had contracted together; a marriage which was unlike ordinary ones, both in the communication of exterior goods, and in the union and conjunction of interior goods. Oh, what a divine union between our Lady and the glorious St. Joseph! an union which made that Good of eternal goods, which is our Lord, belong to St. Joseph, as He belonged to our Lady, (not by the nature that He had taken in the womb of our glorious Mistress, a nature that had been formed by the Holy Spirit of the most pure blood of our Lady), but according to grace, which made him a partaker of all the goods of his dear Spouse, and which made him go on growing wonderfully in perfection; and this was by his continual communication with our Lady, who possessed all virtues in so high a degree that no other pure creature can attain to it. Still the glorious St. Joseph was the one who approached nearest to it; and as we see a mirror opposite to the rays of the sun receive its rays very perfectly, and another mirror placed opposite to that which receives them (though the last mirror takes or receives the rays of the sun only by reverberation,) yet represent them so clearly that we can hardly decide which it is that receives them immediately from the sun, whether that which is opposite the sun, or that which receives them only by reverberation: so was it with our Lady, who was like a very clear mirror opposite to the rays of the Sun of justice, rays which brought into her soul all virtues in their perfection; and these perfections and virtues so perfectly reverberated on St. Joseph, that he almost seemed to be as perfect, and to have virtues in as high a degree as the glorious Virgin our Lady.

But in particular, (to continue the discourse we have begun,) in what degree do we suppose he possessed virginity, a virtue which makes us like the Angels? If the most holy Virgin was not only a virgin most pure and white, but rather (as Holy Church sings in the Responses of the Lessons at Matins—"Holy and immaculate virginity," &c.,) she was virginity itself: how great in this virtue must we suppose him to have been, who was chosen by the Eternal Father to be the guardian of her virginity, or rather to be the companion of it, since she did not need any other guard than herself? They had both made a vow to keep their virginity all their lives, and behold, God willed that they should be united by the bond of a holy marriage, not to make them revoke or repent of their vow, but that they might confirm and fortify each other to persevere in their holy intention; and therefore they vowed again to live together in virginity all the rest of their lives. The Spouse, in the Canticle of Canticles, makes use of admirable terms to describe the modesty, the chastity, and the most innocent purity of His divine affections for His dear and well-beloved spouse. He says thus, "Our sister is little and hath no breasts. What shall we do to our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to? If she be a wall, let us build upon it bulwarks of silver; if she be a door, let us join it together with boards of cedar,"* and line it with some incorruptible wood. This is how the Divine Spouse speaks of the purity of the most holy Virgin, of the Church, or of the devout soul. But this is principally addressed to the most holy

* Cant. viii., 8, 9.

Virgin, who was that divine Sulamitess in an especial manner above all others—"Our sister is little," she does not think of marriage; she has no care of that sort. "What shall we do to our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to?" What does that mean, "in the day when she is to be spoken to?" Does not the Divine Spouse always speak to her, when it pleases Him? "In the day when she is to be spoken to," this means the principal words, which are spoken to young girls about their being married; because they are words of importance, since they concern the choice and election of a vocation, and a state in which they must remain. "If she is a wall," says the sacred Spouse, "let us build upon it bulwarks of silver; if she be a door," far from wishing to break through it, we will line it or strengthen it with boards of cedar, which is an incorruptible wood. The most glorious Virgin was a tower and very high walls, into the enclosure of which the enemy could not by any means enter, nor any other sort of desires than to live in perfect purity and virginity. What shall we do to her? for she must be married, He who gave her this resolution of virginity having so ordained. If she is a tower, or a wall, let us build upon it bulwarks of silver, which, far from overthrowing the tower, will strengthen it the more. Is not the glorious St. Joseph a strong bulwark which has been built upon our Lady? since being his Spouse, she was subject to him, and he took care of her. St. Joseph, then, far from having been placed over our Lady to make her break her vow of virginity, was given her for a companion, and in order that the purity of our Lady might more admirably preserve its integrity,

under the veil and shadow of their holy marriage and holy union. If the most holy virgin is a door, said the Eternal Father, we will that it be not opened; for it is an Eastern Gate, by which none may go in or out; on the contrary, it must be lined and strengthened with incorruptible wood, that is, she must have a companion in her purity, the great St. Joseph, who for this end was to surpass all the saints, and even the Angels and the Cherubim, in this most estimable virtue of virginity; a virtue which made him resemble the palm-tree, as we have said.

Let us pass on to the second property and virtue which I find in the palm-tree. I say, according to my theory, that there is an exact resemblance and conformity between St. Joseph and the palm-tree in their virtue, which virtue is no other than most holy humility. For although the palm is the prince of trees, it is nevertheless the most humble, which it shows by hiding its flowers in spring, when all other trees display them, and not letting them appear till the time of the great heat. The palm-tree keeps its flowers shut up in coverings in the form of sheaths or cases, which well represents to us the difference between souls aiming at perfection and others, the difference between the just and those who live a worldly life; for worldly and earthly men who live by the laws of earth, as soon as they have any good thought or any reflection that seems to them worthy of esteem, or if they have any virtue, never rest till they have manifested and made it known to all whom they meet; by which they run the same risk as those trees which hasten to push out their flowers in spring, like almond trees; if the frost surprises them,

they perish, and bear no fruit. These worldly men, who from a spirit of pride and ambition are so ready to bring out their flowers in the spring of this mortal life, always run the risk of being overtaken by the frost, which makes them lose the fruit of their actions. The just, on the contrary, keep all their flowers always enclosed in the sheath of holy humility, and do not let them appear at all, if they can avoid it, till the great heats, when God, the Divine Sun of Justice, will come with power to inflame their hearts in eternal life, where they will for ever bear the sweet fruit of happiness and immortality. The palm-tree does not let its flowers be seen, till the vehement heat of the sun comes to burst the sheaths or cases in which they are enclosed, after which it suddenly shows its fruit. So does the just soul; it keeps its flowers, that is to say, its virtues, hidden under the veil of holy humility till death, when our Lord makes them burst forth and lets them be seen, as the fruit cannot be long in appearing. Oh, how faithful in this respect was the great saint of whom we are speaking! It cannot be dwelt upon sufficiently. For, notwithstanding what he was, in what poverty and in what abjection did he not live all the time of his life! Under this poverty and abjection he kept concealed his great virtues and dignities. But, what dignities! My God! to be the guardian of our Lord; and not only that, but to be also His reputed father. To be the husband of His most holy Mother! Oh! I have indeed no doubt that the Angels, ravished with admiration, came in troops to contemplate him and to admire his humility, when he kept that dear Child in his poor workshop,

where he laboured at his trade to support both the Son and the Mother, who were confided to him.

There is no doubt, my dear sisters, that St. Joseph was more valiant than David, and wiser than Solomon; yet who could have thought so, without being enlightened by heavenly light, seeing him reduced to exercise the trade of a carpenter? so completely did he keep hidden all the signal gifts that God had bestowed upon him. But what amount of wisdom did he not possess, since God gave in charge to him His most glorious Son, and chose him to be His guardian? If the princes of the earth take so much care and think it of such importance to give their children a guardian of the greatest capacity, and since God could choose for the guardian of His Son the man in the world the most accomplished in all sorts of perfections, according to the dignity and excellence of his Charge, who was His most glorious Son, the universal Prince of heaven and earth; how could it be that being able, He did not will it and did not do it? There is, then, no doubt that St. Joseph was endowed with all the graces and all the gifts that were required for the care which the Eternal Father willed to give him of the temporal and domestic economy of our Lord, and of the guidance of His family. This was composed of only three persons, who represent to us the mystery of the most holy and most adorable Trinity; not that there is any comparison except with regard to our Lord, who is one of the Persons of the most Holy Trinity, for the others are creatures. But yet we may say that it is a Trinity on earth, which in a manner represents to us the most Holy Trinity: Mary,

Jesus and Joseph; Joseph, Jesus and Mary; a Trinity marvellously estimable and worthy of being honoured.

You understand, then, how elevated was the dignity of St. Joseph, and how he was filled with all sorts of virtues; you see also how, nevertheless, he was more humble and abject than we can describe or imagine. This one example will suffice to make it clear. He goes into his own country and to his town of Bethlehem, and, (as far as we know), nobody but himself was rejected from all the houses; so as to be forced to retire and to take his chaste spouse into a stable among the oxen and asses. Oh, to what an extremity was his abjection and humility reduced! His humility was the reason (thus St. Bernard explains it) that he wanted to leave our Lady, when he found her with child; for St. Bernard says that he held this discourse within himself; What is this? I know that she is a virgin, for we have made a vow together to keep our virginity and purity, which she would not on any account break, and yet I see that she is with child and that she is a mother. How can it be that maternity is found with virginity, and that virginity does not prevent maternity? O God! he said to himself, may she not be that glorious virgin of whom the prophets declare that she shall conceive and be the Mother of the Messias? Oh! if it be so, God forbid that I should remain with her, I who am so unworthy; it were better to abandon her secretly, on account of my unworthiness, and not to live any longer in her company. An admirable sentiment of humility, which also made St. Peter cry out in the boat in which he was with our Lord, when he saw His infinite power manifested in the great draught of fishes on His only

commanding them to cast their nets into the sea: "Depart from me," he said, (transported with a feeling of humility like St. Joseph), "depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,"* and therefore I am not worthy to be with Thee. I know well, he meant to say, that if I throw myself into the sea, I shall perish; but Thou art all powerful, Thou wilt walk on the waters without danger, therefore I entreat Thee that Thou shouldst depart from me, and not that I should depart from Thee.

But if St. Joseph was careful to keep his virtues hidden under the shelter of holy humility, he took especial care to conceal the precious pearl of his virginity; and for this reason he consented to be married, that no one might know it, and that under the holy veil of marriage he might live more hidden. By this, virgins and those who wish to live chastely, are taught that it is not enough for them to be virgins, if they are not humble, and do not shut up their purity in the precious box of humility. For otherwise it will happen to them, as to the foolish virgins, who for want of humility and merciful charity, were driven away from the marriage of the Spouse, and were obliged to go to the marriage of the world, where they do not observe the counsel of the Heavenly Spouse, who says that one must be humble to go to the marriage: I mean, that one must practise humility; for He says, in going to a marriage or being invited to a marriage feast, take the lowest place. By this we see how necessary is humility to the preservation of virginity; since without doubt no one will be

* St. Luke, v. 8.

admitted to the celestial banquet and to the nuptial feast which God prepares for virgins in the celestial abode, unless he be accompanied by this virtue. We do not keep precious things, especially odoriferous ointments, exposed to the open air; for besides that the odours would evaporate, the flies would spoil them and make them lose their goodness and their value. In like manner just souls, fearing to lose the excellence and value of their good works, usually shut them up in a box, and not in a common box, any more than we do precious ointments, but in a box of alabaster, such as that which St. Magdalen emptied on the sacred Head of our Lord, when He restored her to virginity, not essential, but repaired; which, being acquired and re-established by penance, is sometimes more excellent than that which, having received no stain, is accompanied by less humility. This box of alabaster then is humility, in which we ought, in imitation of our Lady and St. Joseph, to shut up our virtues and all that may make us esteemed by men, contenting ourselves with pleasing God, and remaining under the sacred veil of our own abjection, waiting, as we have said, till God shall come to take us to the place of safety, which is Heaven, and shall make known our virtues for His honour and glory. But what more perfect humility can be imagined than that of St. Joseph? (I leave aside that of our Lady; for we have already said that St. Joseph received a great increase of all virtues by a sort of reverberation of those of our Lady.) He had a great share in that divine treasure which he had dwelling with him, who is our Lord and Master; and yet he kept himself so humble and abased, that he seemed to

have no share in it; nevertheless it belonged to him more than to any other, after the most holy Virgin; and no one can doubt it, since He was one of his family, and the Son of his Spouse who belonged to him.

I am accustomed to say that if a dove (to make the comparison more conformable to the purity of the saints of whom I am speaking) carried in her beak a date, and let it fall in a garden, would not one say that the palm-tree which should spring from it, would belong to the owner of the garden? Now, if this is so, no one can doubt that the Holy Spirit having, like a Divine Dove, let fall this divine date in the enclosed and shut up garden of the most holy Virgin (a garden sealed and surrounded on all sides with the hedge of the holy vow of virginity, and of chastity all immaculate) which belonged to the glorious St. Joseph as the wife or spouse to the husband; no one can doubt, I say, or deny that this divine palm-tree, which bears the fruit that nourishes to immortality, belonged entirely to the great St. Joseph, who yet did not exalt himself the more for it, did not become more proud, but became always more humble. O God! how beautiful it was to see the respect and reverence with which he treated both the Mother and the Son! If he had wished to leave the Mother when he was not quite aware of the greatness of her dignity, into what admiration and profound abasement was he not afterwards plunged, when he saw himself so honoured that our Lord and our Lady became obedient to his will, and did nothing but by his command?

This is a thing which cannot be understood: therefore we must pass on to the third property which I

observe in the palm, that is valour, constancy, and strength, virtues which existed in our saint in a very eminent degree. The palm has a strength and a valour and even a great constancy, beyond all other trees; so is it the first of all. It shows its strength and constancy in that the more it is burdened, the more it rises and the taller it grows; which is quite contrary to the nature, not only of other trees, but of all other things; for the more one is burdened, the more one leans down towards the earth. But the palm-tree shows its strength and its constancy by never submitting or lowering itself, for any burden that is laid upon it; for its instinct is to rise on high, and therefore it cannot be prevented from doing it. It shows its valour by its leaves being in the form of swords, and it seems to have as many weapons to fight with as it has leaves. It is certainly with very good reason that St. Joseph is said to resemble the palm-tree, for he was always very valiant, constant, and persevering.

There is a great difference between constancy and perseverance, and between strength and valour. We call a man constant who stands firm and prepared to endure the assaults of his enemies, without being dismayed or losing courage during the combat. But perseverance chiefly regards a certain interior weariness which comes upon us from the length of our sufferings, and which is as powerful an enemy as can be encountered. Now perseverance makes a man despise this enemy, so that he obtains the victory by a continual equality and submission to the will of God. Strength is what makes a man powerfully resist the attacks of his enemies; but

valour is a virtue which makes him not only keep himself in readiness to fight or to resist when the occasion presents itself, but to attack the enemy even when he is quiet. Now our glorious St. Joseph was endowed with all these virtues, and practised them marvellously well. With regard to his constancy, how did he show it when, seeing our Lady with child and not knowing how that could be, (O God, what distress, what trouble of mind did he not suffer!) nevertheless he does not complain, he is not unkind, nor less gracious towards his spouse, he does not illtreat her on that account, but remains as gentle and as respectful to her as he had ever been.

But what valour and what strength does he not show in the victory that he gained over the two great enemies of man, the devil and the world! And that by the exact practice of humility, as we have observed in the whole course of his life. The devil is so much the enemy of humility, because for want of it he was driven from heaven and precipitated into hell, (as if humility were to blame that he had not chosen it for his inseparable companion) that there is no invention nor artifice that he will not employ to induce man to abandon this virtue; all the more because he knows that it is a virtue which renders him infinitely pleasing to God. And we may well say, valiant and strong is the man who, like St. Joseph, perseveres in this virtue; for he conquers at the same time the devil and the world, which is full of ambition, vanity and pride.

With regard to perseverance against that interior enemy, the weariness or distress that comes over us from the continuation of abject, humiliating and painful

things, of misfortunes if we must so speak, or from the various accidents that happen to us; Oh! how greatly was this Saint tried by God and by men even in his journey! The Angel commands him to set out quickly, and to take our Lady and her most dear Son into Egypt; and behold, he sets out at once without saying a word. He does not inquire, "Where shall I go? What road shall I take? How shall we find food? Who will receive us?" He sets out probably with his tools on his back, in order to gain in the sweat of his brow his poor bread and that of his family. Oh! how much he must have felt that distress of which we are speaking, seeing that the Angel had not even told him how long he was to remain there! He could not establish himself in any permanent home, not knowing when the Angel might command him to return. If St. Paul so much admired the obedience of Abraham, in that when God had not told him which way he should go, Abraham did not ask, Lord, Thou tellest me to go out, but tell me then whether it is to be by the south or by the east gate; but he set out immediately, and went as the Spirit of God conducted him; how admirable is this perfect obedience of St. Joseph! The Angel did not tell him what time he was to remain in Egypt, and he did not inquire; he dwelt there for the space of five years, as most persons think, without inquiring about his return, being sure that He who had commanded him to go, would again command him when he had to return, and he was always ready to obey. He was in a land, not only of strangers, but of enemies of the Israelites; inasmuch as the Egyptians still resented their departure and their having been the cause of a great number of

the Egyptians being drowned in pursuit of them. I leave you to imagine how much St. Joseph must have longed to return, because of the continual fears he must have had among the Egyptians. The anxiety of not knowing when he should go away, must no doubt have greatly afflicted and tormented his poor heart; nevertheless he remained always the same, always sweet, tranquil, and persevering in his submission to the good pleasure of God, by which he let himself be entirely guided; for as he was just, his will was always submissive, united, and conformed to that of God. To be just is nothing else but to be perfectly united to the will of God, and to be conformed to it in all events, prosperous or adverse.

That St. Joseph was always, on all occasions, perfectly submissive to the Divine Will, none can doubt; and do not you see it? Look how the Angel turns him in every direction; he tells him that he must go into Egypt; he goes there; he commands him to return, and he returns. God wills that he should be poor, which is one of the greatest trials He can give us; he submits to it lovingly, and not for a time, but for his whole life. And what was his poverty? A poverty despised, rejected, and necessitous. The voluntary poverty which religious profess, is very amiable, inasmuch as it does not prevent their receiving and taking those things that are necessary for them; forbidding and depriving them of superfluities only. But the poverty of St. Joseph, of our Lord and of our Lady, was not such; for though it was voluntary, because he loved it dearly, it was nevertheless abject, rejected, and despised. For every one held this great Saint to be

poor carpenter, who, doubtless, could not prevent his little family from being in want of many necessaries, though he laboured with unequalled affection for their support; after which he submitted very humbly to the will of God, in the continuation of his poverty and abjection, not letting himself be in the least overcome or cast down by the interior distress, which no doubt made many attacks upon him; but he remained always constant in his submission, which, like all his other virtues, went on always increasing and perfecting itself. So also our Lady gained every day an increase of virtues and perfections which she derived from her most holy Son, who, not being able to grow in anything, since He was from the instant of His conception such as He is and will be eternally, caused the Holy Family in which He was, to be continually growing and advancing in perfection, our Lady drawing her perfection from His Divine Goodness, and St. Joseph receiving it (as we have already said) by the intervention of our Lady.

Nothing more now remains for us to say, but that we must nowise doubt that this glorious Saint has great credit in heaven with Him who has so favoured him as to raise him to it both body and soul; which is the more probable as we have no relic of him here below on earth; and it seems to me that no one can doubt this truth. For how could He who had been obedient to him all the time of His life, have refused this grace to St. Joseph? No doubt, when our Lord descended to Limbus, St. Joseph spoke to Him in this manner; O my Lord, I pray Thee to remember that when Thou camest from heaven to earth, I received Thee into

my house, into my family; and that as soon as Thou wast born, I received Thee into my arms; now that Thou art going to heaven take me with Thee. I received Thee into my family, receive me now into Thine, since Thou art going there. I have carried Thee in my arms, carry me now in Thine; and as I took care to support and guide Thee during the course of Thy mortal life, do Thou take care of me and guide me to life eternal. And if it is true, as we must believe, that by virtue of the most Holy Sacrament which we receive, our bodies will rise again at the day of judgment, how can we doubt that our Lord caused to rise with Him to heaven in body and soul the glorious St. Joseph who had had the honour and the grace of carrying Him so often in his blessed arms, in which our Lord took such pleasure? Oh, how many kisses He tenderly gave him with His blessed mouth, to reward, in some measure, his labour! St. Joseph, then, is in heaven in body and soul, there is no doubt of it. Oh, how happy should we be, if we could deserve to have a share in his holy intercession! for nothing will be refused him, either by our Lady, or by her glorious Son. He will obtain for us, if we have confidence in him, a holy growth in all sorts of virtues, but especially in those we have found that he possessed in a higher degree than any others, which are most holy purity of body and mind, the most amiable virtue of humility, constancy, valour, and perseverance; virtues which will render us victorious over our enemies in this life, and make us merit the grace to go and enjoy in eternal life the reward prepared for those who shall imitate the example given them by St. Joseph while he was in this life, a reward which will

be nothing less than eternal happiness, in which we shall enjoy the clear vision of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Dieu soit béni.

Vive ✠ Jesus.

CONFERENCE XX.

INTENTION IN ENTERING RELIGION.

In which it is asked what intention we should have in entering religion.

The question which our mother wishes me to explain to you, my dear daughters, as to what intention one ought to have in entering religion, is indeed the most important, the most necessary, and the most useful, that can be discussed. Certainly, my dear daughters, many persons enter religion, who do not know why they do so. They come into a parlour, they see nuns with a serene countenance and pleasing manners, very modest, very happy, and they say to themselves, "Good God! how pleasant it is there! Let us go there, for the world does not smile upon us, we shall not find what we wish for in it." Another will say, "Oh! how well they sing in there!" Others come to find peace, consolations, and all sorts of sweetness, saying in thought,

"Oh! how happy the nuns are! They are out of the reach of father and mother, who do nothing but complain; whom one can never please, one has always to begin again. Our Lord promises many consolations to those who leave the world for His service; let us go then into religion." Here are, my dear daughters, three kinds of intentions, which are of no value for entering the house of God. It must, of necessity, be God who builds the city; otherwise, although it may be built, it would have to be destroyed. I am willing to believe, my dear daughters, that your intentions are quite different, and therefore that you all mean well, and that God will bless this little troop of beginners. Two similes occur to my mind, to give you to understand how and upon what your intention should be founded, to be solid: but I will content myself with explaining one, which will be sufficient. Put the case that an architect is going to build a house; he does two things, first he considers whether his building is to serve for some private individual, for a prince, or for a king, because he must proceed in a different manner: then he calculates at leisure whether his means are sufficient for it. For if a man were to undertake to build a high tower, and had not wherewith to carry on his building, he would be laughed at for having begun a thing that he could not complete with honour. Then he must resolve to demolish the old building which stands in the place where he wants to build a new one. We want to build a great edifice, my dear daughters, that is, to build within us the abode of God; therefore, let us consider maturely whether we have sufficient courage and resolution to crucify and to demolish our

selves, or rather to allow God Himself to demolish and crucify us, in order that He may build us up again to be the living temples of His Majesty. I say, then, my dear daughters, that our only intention ought to be to unite ourselves to God, as Jesus Christ united Himself to God His Father, by dying on the cross. For I do not mean to speak to you of that general union which is effected by Baptism, in which Christians unite themselves to God by receiving that divine sacrament and character of Christianity, and oblige themselves to keep His commandments, those of Holy Church, to exercise themselves in good works, to practise the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and therefore their union is valid, and they may justly aspire to Paradise, uniting themselves by this means to God as to their God; they are not bound to more, they have attained their end by the general and spacious way of the commandments.

But as to you, my dear daughters, it is not so; for besides the obligation that you have in common with all Christians, God has chosen you by a very special love to be His dear spouses.

We must learn how and what it is to be nuns. It is to be bound to God by the continual mortification of ourselves, and to live for God alone: our own heart always serving His Divine Majesty; our eyes, our tongue, our hands, and our whole selves, continually serving Him. Therefore, you see that religion furnishes you with means well adapted to this end, such as prayer, reading, silence, retirement of the heart to repose in God alone, continual aspirations to our Lord. And because we could not arrive at it without the con-

tinual practice of mortification of all our passions, inclinations, humours, and aversions, we are obliged to watch continually over ourselves, in order to die to all these things. Know, my dear daughters, that "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground, die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." * These words of our Lord are quite clear, His most holy mouth having itself pronounced them. Consequently, you who aspire to the habit, and you who aspire to holy profession, consider again and again whether you have sufficient resolution to die to yourselves, and to live only to God; weigh it all well; you have still a long time to think of it, before your veils are dyed black. For I declare to you, my dear daughters, and I will not flatter you, whoever desires to live according to nature, let him remain in the world; and let those who are determined to live according to grace, come into religion, which is nothing else but a school of abnegation and mortification of oneself; so you see it furnishes you with many instruments of mortification both interior and exterior. "But, indeed," you will say to me, "that is not what I was seeking. I thought that to be a good nun, it was enough to desire to pray well, to have visions and revelations, to see Angels in human form, to be ravished in extasies, to be fond of reading good books. What! I thought I was so virtuous, so mortified, so humble; everybody admired me. Was it not being very humble to speak so sweetly to one's companions about matters of devotion, to repeat sermons at home, to treat amiably with those

* St. John xii. 24, 25.

that lived with me, particularly when they did not contradict me?" Certainly, my dear daughters, that was very well in the world; but religion requires us to do works worthy of our vocation; that is, to die to ourselves in all things, as well in what suits our inclination, as in bad and useless things. Do you think those good religious of the desert, who arrived at so great a degree of union with God, attained to it by following their inclinations? Certainly not; they mortified themselves in the most holy things, and although they took great pleasure in singing divine canticles, in reading, praying, and other things, they did not do them at all to please themselves; on the contrary, they voluntarily deprived themselves of these pleasures, to give themselves up to laborious and painful works.

It is certainly true, that religious souls receive a thousand joys and sweetnesses amid the mortifications and exercises of holy religion; for it is chiefly to them that the Holy Spirit imparts His precious gifts; therefore, they must seek only God, and the mortification of their humours, passions, and inclinations in holy religion; for if they seek anything else, they will never find in it the consolations they desire. But we must have an invincible courage not to be wearied with ourselves, because we shall always have something to do and to get rid of. The business of religious ought to be to cultivate well their minds, so as to root out all the weeds that our depraved nature causes so to spring up every day, that we seem to have always to do it over again; and as the husbandman ought not to be vexed, since he does not deserve to be blamed for not having gathered a good crop, provided however that

he took care to cultivate the ground well, and to sow it with good seed: in like manner the religious ought not to be disturbed if he does not at once reap the fruits of perfection and of virtues, provided he is very faithful in cultivating well the soil of his heart, by cutting off all that he perceives to be contrary to the perfection which he is bound to aim at, for we shall never be perfectly cured, till we are in Paradise.

When the rule says that you are to ask for books at the hour appointed, do you think that those will usually be given you which would please you best? By no means, that is not the intention of the rule; and it is the same with the other exercises. A sister will think she feels herself strongly drawn to prayer, or to say Office, or to be in retreat; and they will say to her, "Sister, go into the kitchen," or, "Do such or such a thing;" this is bad news for one who is very devout. I say, then, that we must die, in order that God may live in us; for it is impossible to acquire the union of our soul with God by any other means than by mortification. These are hard words: "we must die;" but they are followed by great sweetness; it is in order to be united to God by this death.

You must know that no wise person puts new wine into an old vessel; the wine of divine love cannot enter where the old Adam reigns; we must, of necessity, destroy him. "But how," you will say, "shall we destroy him?" How, my dear daughters? By punctual obedience to your rules. I assure you, on the authority of God, that if you are faithful in doing what they teach you, you will, without any doubt, arrive at the end you ought to have in view, which is to unite

yourselves to God. Observe, that I say, "in doing;" for we do not acquire perfection with our arms crossed; we must labour in good earnest to conquer ourselves, and to live according to reason, to the rule, and to obedience, and not according to the inclinations we brought with us from the world. Religion, indeed, tolerates our bringing our bad habits, passions, and inclinations, but not our living as they would lead us. It gives us rules to serve as presses to our hearts, and to drive out everything that is contrary to God. Live, then, courageously, according to your rules. "But," some one will say, "what can I do? I have not the spirit of the rule." Certainly, my dear daughter, I believe you, it is a thing that one does not bring from the world into religion. The spirit of the rule is acquired by practising the rule faithfully.

I say the same of holy humility and sweetness, the foundation of this Congregation. God will infallibly give it us, if our hearts are well disposed, and we do all we can to acquire it. We shall be very happy if we find ourselves clothed with this robe a quarter of an hour before we die: all our life will be well employed, if we occupy it in sewing, first one piece of it, then another. For this holy habit is not made of one piece only, it requires to have several. You think, perhaps, that perfection might be found ready made, and that we should have nothing to do but to put it over our head, like any other garment. No, my dear daughters, that is not the way.

You tell me, mother, that our sister postulants are well disposed, but that they are wanting in strength to do what they wish; and that they feel their passions to

be so strong, that they are afraid to begin to advance. Courage, my dear daughters, I have told you several times that religion is a school in which to learn our lesson. The master does not require his scholars to know their lesson without making a mistake; it is enough if they pay attention to learning it as well as they can. Thus let us do what we are able, and God will be satisfied, and our superiors too. Do not you see every day persons who are learning to fence? They often fall; so do those who are learning to ride, but they do not for that reason consider themselves overcome, for it is one thing to be sometimes beaten, and another to be absolutely conquered. Your passions sometimes make head against you, and therefore you say, "I am unfit for religion, because I have passions." No, my dear daughters, this is not the case. Religion does not consider it a great triumph to fashion a mind already formed, a soul sweet and tranquil in itself, but it greatly esteems the reducing to virtue souls that are strong in their inclinations; for those souls, if they are faithful, will outstrip the others, acquiring by the point of the spirit what the others possess without any trouble. It is not required of you to have no passions (that is not in your power, and God wills that you should feel them till your death, for your greater merit) nor even that they should not be strong; for that would be saying that a soul with bad habits cannot be fit to serve God. The world is mistaken in this idea; God rejects nothing where malice is not found: for tell me, if you please, how can a person help being of such or such a temperament, subject to such or such a passion? The whole, then, depends on the acts that we make through this

emotion, which depends on our will; sin being so voluntary that without our consent there can be no sin. Put the case that anger takes me by surprise, I will say to it: "Try thy utmost, do what thou wilt, I will do nothing to please thee, not even pronounce one word at thy bidding." God has left us this power; otherwise, in requiring perfection of us, He would bind us to an impossible thing, and this would be an injustice, which cannot be found in God.

On this subject it comes into my mind to relate to you a story which is suitable for you. When Moses descended from the mountain where he had been speaking with God, he saw the people who, having made a golden calf, were worshipping it. Seized with just anger through zeal for the glory of God, he said, turning to the Levites, If any man be on the Lord's side, let him take his sword in hand to kill all whom he shall meet, sparing neither father nor mother, brother nor sister; let him put all to death. The Levites then took their swords in hand, and the bravest was he who killed the most. So, my dear daughters, take in hand the sword of mortification, to kill and destroy your passions; and she who has the most to kill, will be the most valiant, if she will cooperate with grace. These two young souls (one of whom is little more than sixteen years old, and the other only fifteen), have but few to kill; and their spirit is as yet scarcely born. But those great souls who have experienced many things, and have tasted the sweets of Paradise, it is to them that it belongs thoroughly to kill and destroy their passions. As for those, mother, who you say have such great desires of perfection, that they want to surpass all

the rest in virtue, they do well to console their self-love a little; but they will do much better to follow the community, by keeping their rules well: for that is the straight road to arrive at God.

You are very fortunate, my dear daughters, compared to us who are in the world. When we ask the way, one says, "It is to the right," another, "To the left:" and indeed they generally mislead us; but as for you, you have only to let yourselves be carried. You are like those who travel by sea; the ship carries them, and they live in it without care; while they are reposing they make progress, and have nothing to do but to inquire whether they are well on their way; that is the duty of the sailors, who always seeing the beautiful star, that compass of the ship, know that they are in the right course, and say to the others who are in the ship; "Courage, you are making good way, let us go on without fear." This divine compass is our Lord: the boat is your rules; those who guide it, are the superiors, who usually say to you, "Go on, sisters, in the punctual observance of your rules: you will arrive happily at God; He will lead you safely." But take notice that I say to you, walk in punctual and faithful observance; for 'he that neglecteth his way shall die,'* says Solomon. You say, mother, that our sisters say, "It is good to walk by the rules, but that is the general way; God draws us by particular attractions; each one has her own special one, we are not all drawn to the same way." They are right in saying so, and it is true, but it is also true that if that attraction comes from

* Proverbs, xix. 16

God, it will doubtless lead them to obedience. It does not belong to us who are inferiors, to judge of our particular attractions, that is the duty of superiors, and for that purpose particular direction is ordered; be very faithful to it, and you will reap from it the fruit of benediction. If you do what you are taught, my dear daughters, you will be very happy; you will live contented, and will experience even in this life the favours of Paradise, at least in little samples. But if you should feel any interior sweetness and caress from our Lord, take care not to attach yourselves to it; it is like the little aniseed comfits that the apothecary puts on the bitter potion of the sick; the very bitter medicine must be swallowed by the sick man for his health, and though he takes those sugared seeds from the apothecary's hand, he must of necessity afterwards taste the bitterness of the medicine.

You see clearly then what intention you should have, that you may be worthy spouses of our Lord, and render yourselves capable of being espoused to Him on Mount Calvary. Live there all your lives, and form all your actions upon this intention, and God will bless you. All our happiness consists in perseverance. I exhort you to it, my dear daughters, with all my heart, and I pray His Goodness to fill you with grace and with His divine love in this world, and to bring us all to enjoy His glory in the other. Adieu my dear daughters; I carry you all with me in my heart. It would be superfluous to recommend myself to your prayers, for I think in your piety you will not fail to pray for me. I shall send you my blessing every day from the altar; and

meanwhile receive it, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Vive ✠ Jesus.

CONFERENCE XXI.

ASK FOR NOTHING.

On the maxim of asking for nothing and refusing nothing.

I was speaking, mother, one day, to an excellent nun who asked if when one desires to communicate oftener than the community, one may ask the superioress. I answered her that if I were a religious, I think I should do thus: I should not ask to communicate oftener than the community; I should not ask to wear sackcloth, a hair-shirt, a chain, to make extraordinary fasts, to take disciplines, nor anything else. I should content myself with following the community in everything and everywhere; if I was robust, I would not eat four times a day; but if I was told to eat four times, I would do it and say nothing; if I was weak, and they told me to eat only once a day, I should eat only once a day, without thinking whether I was weak or not. I wish for few things, and what I do wish for, I wish for very little; I have hardly any desires: but if I could begin life again, I would have none at all. If God came to me, I

would also go to Him; if He did not will to come to me, I would stay where I was, and not go to Him. I say, then, that we must ask for nothing and refuse nothing, but leave ourselves in the arms of Divine Providence, without amusing ourselves with any desire, except wishing what God wills of us. St. Paul, at the very moment of his conversion, excellently practised this abandonment. When our Lord had struck him blind, he said instantly, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" * And thenceforward he continued in absolute dependance upon what God might ordain for him. All our perfection consists in the practice of this point; and the same St. Paul, writing to one of his disciples, forbids him among other things to let his heart be occupied by any desire, so well did he know the importance of this fault.

You ask me if we should not desire virtues, since our Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." † Oh, my daughter! when I say you must ask for nothing and desire nothing, I mean things of the earth; for with regard to virtues, we may ask for them; and when we ask for the love of God, we comprise them all, for it contains them all.

"But in exterior employments," you say, "might we not desire the lowest offices, because they are more painful, and give us more to do and more means of humbling ourselves for God?" My daughter, David said that he chose rather to be an abject in the house of his God, than to be great among sinners.‡ "O Lord,"

* Acts ix. 6. † St. Matthew, vii. 7.

‡ Ps. lxxxiii. 11.

he said, "it is good for me that Thou hast humbled me, that I may learn Thy justifications."* Nevertheless, this desire is still very suspicious, and may be a human cogitation. How do you know whether, having wished for low offices, you will have the strength to be pleased with the abjections that are met with in them? A great deal of disgust and bitterness may come upon you in them. Even if you feel that you now have strength to endure mortification and humiliation, how do you know that you will always have it? In short, we must consider it a temptation to desire offices, whatever they may be, either low or honourable; it is always better to desire nothing, but to keep ourselves in readiness to receive those which obedience may impose upon us; and whether they were honourable or abject, I would take and receive them humbly, without saying a single word, unless I was questioned; and then I would simply answer the truth as I felt it.

You ask me how to practise this maxim of holy indifference in illness. I find in the Holy Gospels a perfect model of it in St. Peter's mother-in-law. This woman being in bed with a bad fever, practised several virtues; but the one that I admire the most, is her abandonment of herself to the Providence of God, and to the care of her superiors, remaining under the fever, tranquil, peaceable, and without any uneasiness, and giving none to those who were about her. Every one knows how those who suffer from fever are tormented; how it prevents their resting, and gives them a thousand other annoyances. Now, the complete way in which

* Ps. cxviii. 71.

our patient gave herself up into the hands of her superiors, made her have no uneasiness nor care about her health, or her recovery; she was satisfied to bear her sickness with sweetness and patience. O God! how happy was this good woman! She certainly well deserved that they should take care of her, as the Apostles did, who provided for her cure, without being solicited by her, but out of charity and compassion for what she was suffering. Happy will be the religious who shall make this great and absolute abandonment of themselves into the hands of their superiors, who, from motives of charity, will carefully serve them and provide for all their wants and necessities; for charity is stronger and presses more closely than nature. This dear patient knew very well that our Lord was in Capharnaum, and that He healed the sick; yet she was not troubled nor anxious to send Him word what she was suffering. But what is still more admirable, she sees Him in her house, where He looks at her, and she also looks at Him; and she does not say a single word to Him of her sickness, to excite His pity for her, nor is she eager to touch Him in order to be cured. Now, that uneasiness of spirit which is felt in sufferings and sickness, to which not only people in the world, but also very often religious are subject, proceeds from ill-regulated self-love. Our patient gives no importance to her illness, she is not tender; she suffers without caring that people should pity her or procure her recovery; she is satisfied that it is known to God and to the superiors who govern her. She sees our Lord in her house as the Sovereign Physician, but she does not regard Him as such, so little did she think of her cure; but she

considered Him as her God, to whom she belonged, whether in health or sickness, being equally contented whether sick, or in the possession of perfect health. Oh, how many artifices some persons would have used to obtain their cure from our Lord, saying they asked for health to serve Him better, fearing that something might be wanting to Him! But this good woman had no thoughts of this kind, and showed her resignation by not asking for her cure. I do not, however, mean to say that we may not indeed ask it of our Lord, as of Him who is able to give it us, with this condition, if such is His will; for we ought always to say: "Fiat voluntas tua." It is not enough to be ill and to have afflictions, since God wills it, but we must be so as He wills, when He wills, as long as He wills, and in the manner He pleases; making no [illegible] and refusing no evil or affliction, however abject and dishonourable it may seem to us; for evils and afflictions without abjection very often puff up the heart, instead of humbling it. But when we suffer evils without honour, or when dishonour itself, abasement and abjection are our evil, how many occasions we have of practising patience, humility, modesty, and sweetness of spirit and of heart! Let us then take great care, like this good woman, to keep our heart in sweetness, deriving profit, like her, from our sicknesses; for she arose as soon as our Lord had driven away the fever, and served Him at table: wherein she certainly showed great virtue, and the profit she had made of her illness, because being relieved from it she would make use of her health only for the service of our Lord, in which she employed herself the very instant she recovered it. For the rest, she is not like

those worldly persons, who after an illness of a few days, require weeks and months to recover.

Our Lord upon the cross, shows us plainly how we ought to mortify our tenderness. For being very thirsty, He did not ask for something to drink, but simply made known His need, saying, "I thirst:"* after which He made an act of very great submission; for some one having held out to Him on the point of a lance a piece of sponge soaked in vinegar to quench His thirst, He sucked it with His blessed lips. A strange thing! He was not ignorant that it was a beverage that would increase His pains, nevertheless He took it simply without showing that it annoyed Him or that He did not find it good, in order to teach us with what submission we should take the remedies and the food offered to us when we are sick, without making so many signs that we are disgusted and annoyed at them, even if we should doubt whether they would not increase our sufferings. Alas! if we have to bear ever so little inconvenience, we do quite the contrary to what our sweet Master has taught us; for we do not cease to lament, and we cannot find people enough, it seems, to complain and relate our griefs to in detail; our evil whatever it may be, is incomparable, and what others suffer is nothing compared to it; we are more fretful and impatient than can be described; nothing goes right, so as to please us. In short it is a great pity how little we imitate the patience of our Lord, who forgot His griefs, and endeavoured that they should not be observed by men; being satisfied that His heavenly Father, in

* John, xix. 28.

obedience to whom He suffered them, should consider them, and appease His anger against human nature for which He suffered.

You ask what I desire to be most deeply engraved in your mind, that you may put it in practice. Ah my dear daughters! what shall I say to you but those two dear words, which I have already so strongly recommended? Desire nothing, refuse nothing. In those two words I say everything; for this maxim comprises the practice of perfect indifference. Look at the poor little Jesus in the manger: He accepts poverty, nakedness, the company of animals, all the injuries of the weather, the cold, and all that His Father permits to happen to Him. It is not written that He ever stretched out His hands for His Mother's breast; He left Himself entirely to her care, and foresight: nor did He refuse any of the little comforts that she gave Him. He received the services of St. Joseph, the adoration of the kings and of the shepherds, all with the same good will. Thus we ought to desire nothing, and to refuse nothing, but to suffer and to receive with equal readiness all that the Providence of God may permit to happen to us. May God give us this grace.

Dieu soit béni.

THE END.

RICHARDSON AND SON

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
(510) 649-2500

GTU LIBRARY
3 2400 00570 9658